

Sketch

COMIC BOOK ART TECHNIQUES

#34

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**TOM
BIERBAUM**

Rookie Mistakes

**MITCH
BYRD**

Man on a Mission

**GARY
BARKER**

Classroom Collaboration!

**ANTHONY D
LEE**

Coloring with Photoshop

**ROBERT W
HICKEY**

ComicPress

SKOTTIE YOUNG

INTERVIEW

Mutants, Demons and more

ALLISON SOHN

SKETCH CARDS

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SKETCH MAGAZINE #36

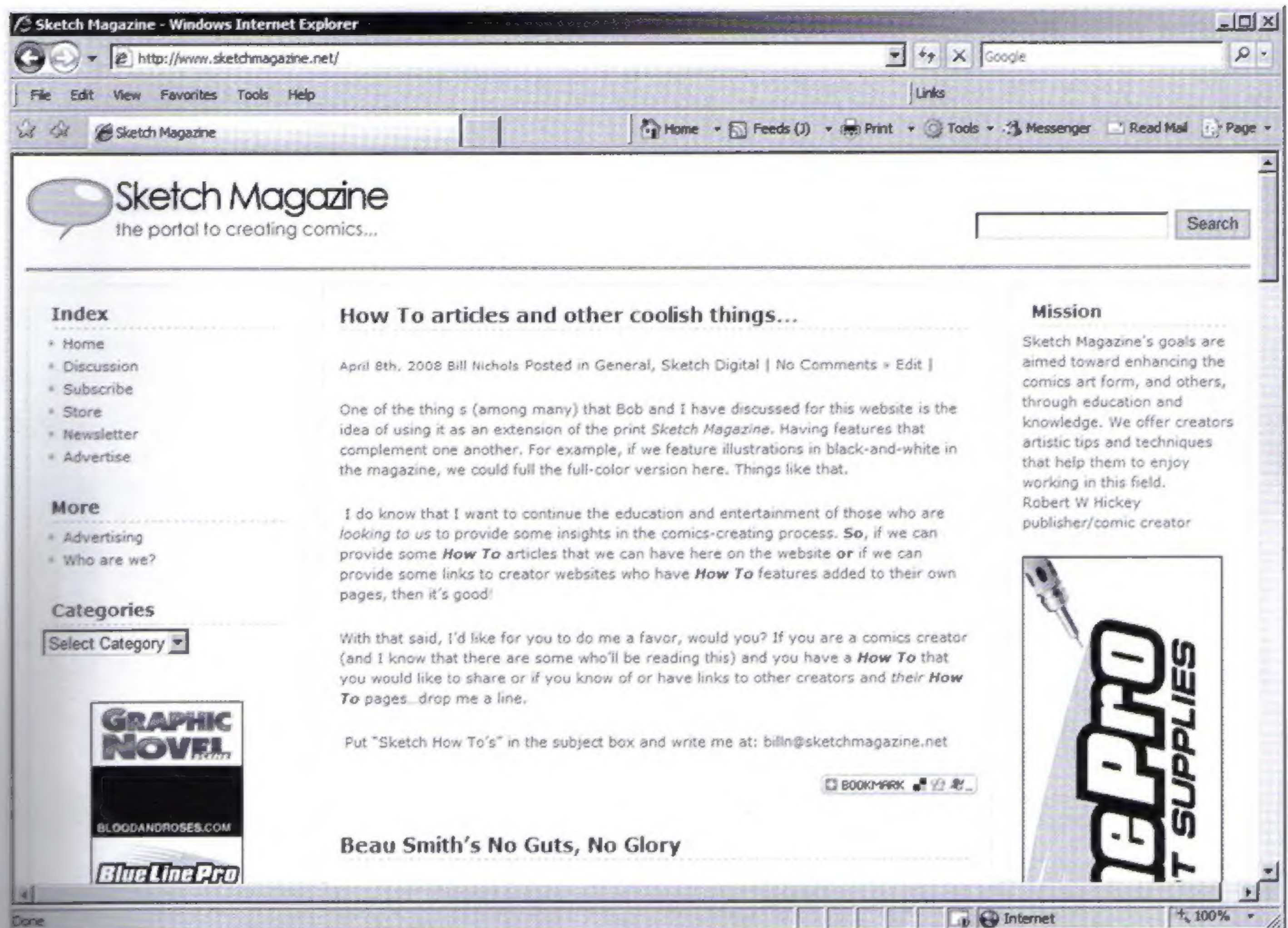


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A black and white portrait of a man with dark hair, glasses, and a mustache. He is wearing a light-colored, possibly white, shirt. He is looking slightly to his right with a neutral expression. The background is dark and indistinct.

Communication has become more important than ever for creators. Building blog pages, using community blog sites like **Livejournal.com** or using **Twitter.com**. Each of these offers easy-to-use tools to communicate to a community that you've built around your work. Building that community takes time and effort. Giving a little of yourself in your post gives the community a feeling that they are a part of your creative process.

Podcasts are another form of communications, just like this magazine and SKETCHMAGAZINE.NET. We are communicating with creators so they can take the information and build upon it and we hope the creators also pass along their knowledge to the next group of creators.

Sketch Magazine – print

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What are you doing?

Take care,
Robert W Hickey

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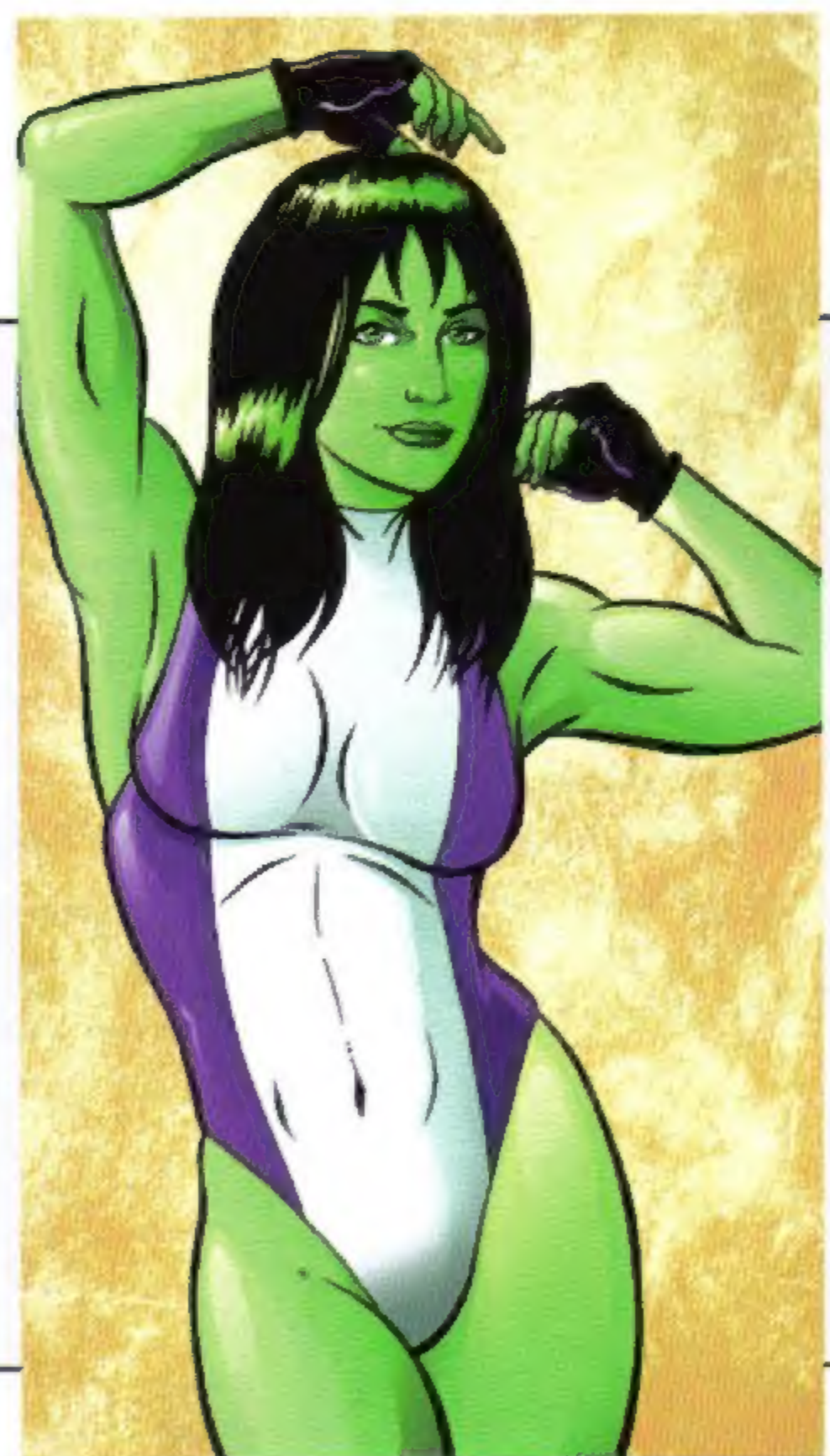
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Coloring in Photoshop by Anthony D Lee



Robert W. Hickey

Along with his duties as publisher of Sketch Magazine, he is the creative force behind Blood & Roses, StormQuest, Tempered Steele and Race Danger. He currently has a new Blood and Roses project in the works that will be appearing at SKYSTORMONLINE.COM. Bob is one of the co-founders of Blue Line Art and Afterburn Media LLC.



Bill Nichols

As editor of *Sketch Magazine*, Bill welcomes the chance to educate and help other pros to pass along their hard-earned knowledge of All Things Comic Book. Bill has inked for Knight Press (*StormQuest*, *Blood and Roses*, *Dead Kid Adventures*), Caliber Press (*Raven Chronicles*, *LegendLore*, *Magus*) and others. As co-publisher of SkyStorm Studios, Bill is excited to be working on some old favorites and some new stories, as well as bringing life to his own Sparta Bay project.



Tom Bierbaum

Tom, with wife Mary, has scripted such comics as Legion of Super-Heroes and The Heckler for DC Comics, Xena and Return to Jurassic Park for Topps Comics, Star for Image Comics and Dead Kid Adventures, a creator owned project by Knight Press.



Mitch Byrd

Mitch's pencils wow everyone. While you enjoy his exclusive Sketch material issue after issue, look for his work on Guy Gardner: Warrior, Shi, Starship Troopers, and many other comics, as well as Blue Line Art's Notes to Draw From, Notes to Draw From 2 and Mitch Byrd's Scribbles and Sketches. Mitch's latest projects include a Blood and Roses graphic novel and a creator owned project titled Kings of the Road.



Bob Almond

A comics fan since the age of nine, Bob instantly set his career goal on breaking into the funny book biz and is probably most-known for his 3-year critically-acclaimed run with Priest & Sal Velluto on Black Panther. His most recent assignment has been a return to his cosmic Marvel roots with the *Annihilation Conquest: Quasar* series. Bob lives in New Bedford, Massachusetts with his wife Diane, his son Nathan and cats Tux and BJ. You can visit his website The Bob Almond Inkwell at <http://www.almondink.com>

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Comic books are a **fun medium**! Blue Line Arts' goals are aimed toward enhancing this art form - and others - through knowledge and quality art supplies. We try hard to make certain that you, the reader, have the comic book technique information you require for your personal enjoyment of this great field.

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If you know of any good "How-To" and/or "Step-by-Step" articles online, please let us know so we can feature them on SKETCHMAGAZINE.NET



Bills Words...



My trip to **Wizard World Chicago** started with a flat tire.

And not only that, the tire iron was too big for the nuts and the spare "donut" that came with the car had holes for four bolts, not the five on the wheel. Almost as if the dealer I'd bought the car from had taken one each from a pile of tire irons and spare tires and just checked them off the list. Yep, this car has *everything*!

And only five miles or so from my house on my way to meet my buddy John Wilson a mere five miles away at my dad's house where I could leave my car over the weekend.

Thankfully, that all got worked out. We made it to the convention and it was a great weekend for the editor of *Sketch Magazine*! I got the opportunity to meet a number of creators and past contributors (and some future contributors, I hope) to the magazine, like **Scott Story, Paul Sizer, Billy Tucci, Chuck Dixon, Mike Maydak, Francesco** and especially the guys who made it from our **Art Unleashed** message board. All those people made the trip worth it for me.

I could have given up. Early, early Friday morning I sure felt like it, but John didn't give up on me, Bob Hickey didn't give up on me, and in the end, I didn't give up on myself.

Hope.

It's something that we should all have, but we don't. Sometimes, it's the way things that hit us with the rough knocks of life. Finances. Relationships. Work. It all can work against you. Or you can grab yourself by the bootstraps and just do what you must to achieve your goals.

Reading over the editorials of the past few issues, I realize that I may be somewhat heavy-handed in my tone. Then again, some of you need that wake up call. Sometimes when I'm telling you these things, be advised that I'm also talking to myself.

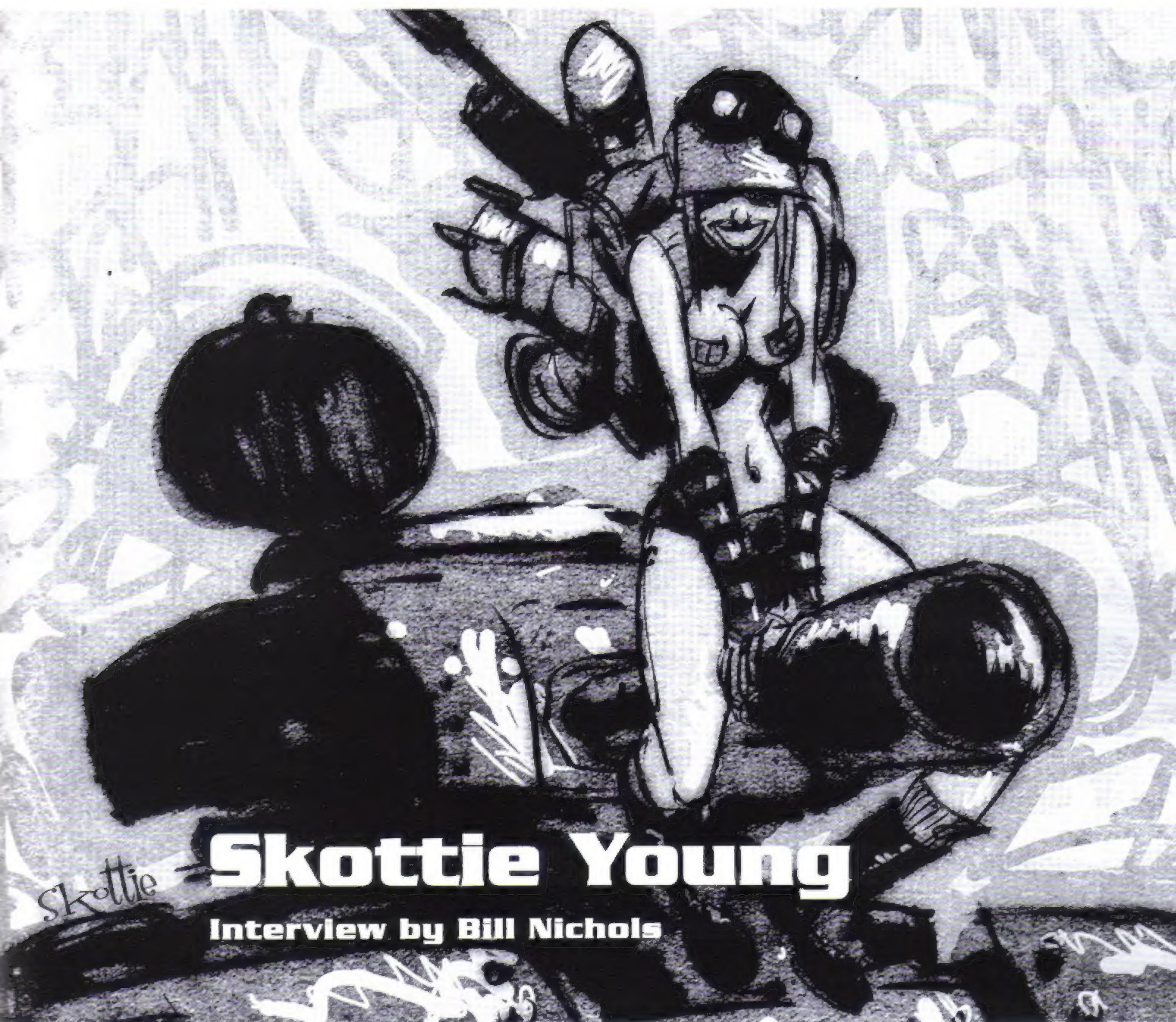
What do we have in store for you here in these pages? Lots of cool stuff!

What's coming up? Well, we'll have interviews with **Ryan Ottley** in #37, **Geoff Johns** in #38. **Adam Hughes, Billy Tucci, Tim Truman**, and **Colleen Doran** are coming through with interviews and **J. Scott Campbell** will be, too in the future, along with **Gabriel Ba** and **David Petersen**. I'm looking forward to the things to come.

I hope you are, too!

Bill
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Skottie Young

Interview by Bill Nichols

Sketch: What's on your drawing table right now, Skottie?

Skottie: *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. I have the privilege of working on the adaptation of the classic novel for Marvel's *Illustrated Classic* line.

Sketch: What would you rather be doing? Or are you doing it?

Skottie: Ha ha, what a question. I love what I'm working on right now,

but I think that I will always want to be working on my own stories. It's taken me some time but I've finally sat myself down and started writing. Hopefully in the next year or so you'll start seeing some of my creator-owned work out there in the world.

Sketch: What are some of your influences?

Skottie: I'm at an interesting time in my artistic life. Like most

artists, my list of influences grows by the hour, but lately I've been going thru a bit of an awakening. Early in my career I was very influenced by **Humberto Ramos**, **Carlos Meglia**, **Chris Bachalo**, **Joe Mad**, **J. Scott Campbell**, and other people who had that energetic, almost animated style. Those were the guys that drew the comics I collected as a kid and so they played a huge role in my growth as an artist. I will always love and be



Victor Borkowski

"Anole"

Age: 15



inspired by these incredible artists.

In the last few years I felt a little bored of my own art. It's odd to say that, but everything just started to feel a little stale. I figured out my process and things worked like clockwork. Doodle thumbnail...check. Clean up and add detail.... check. Scan, print blueline and ink as if it's an animated cell...check. Things started to feel a little robotic and I was thinking about shaking things up a bit. I had the chance to write and illustrate a short *Monster of Frankenstein* story for Marvel and I thought this would be the perfect tale to reach outside of my own box. So I started soaking in some

guys that still had a unique style but had a little more texture and looseness to it. **Ashley Wood, Jon Foster, Tommy Lee Edwards, Bill Sienkiewicz, Jason Pearson, Eric Canete, Jerome Opena** and on and on and on. I just started opening up and taking many more different styles in and hoping that it would help me learn a few more things.

Sketch: Is there anyone you might want to collaborate with?

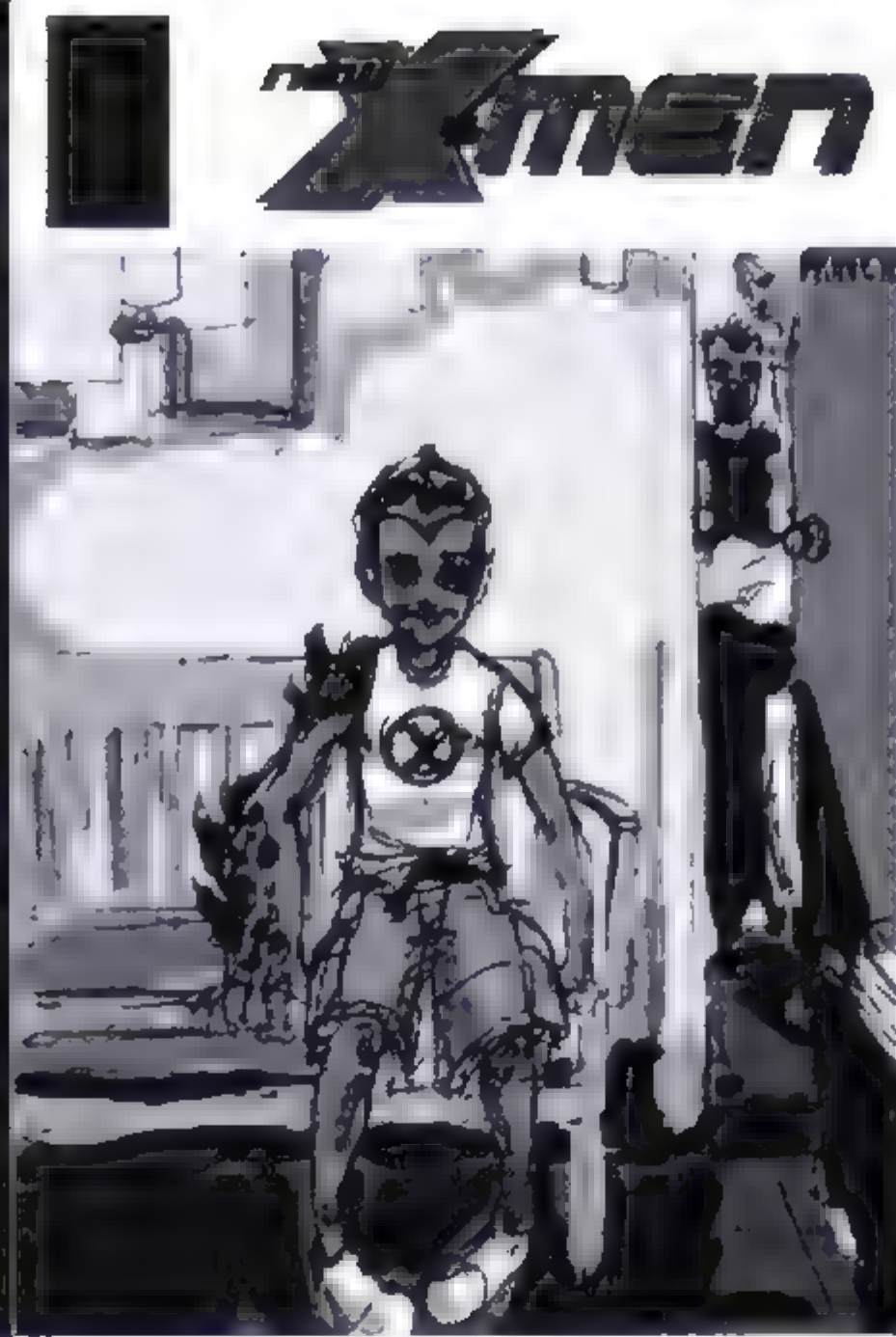
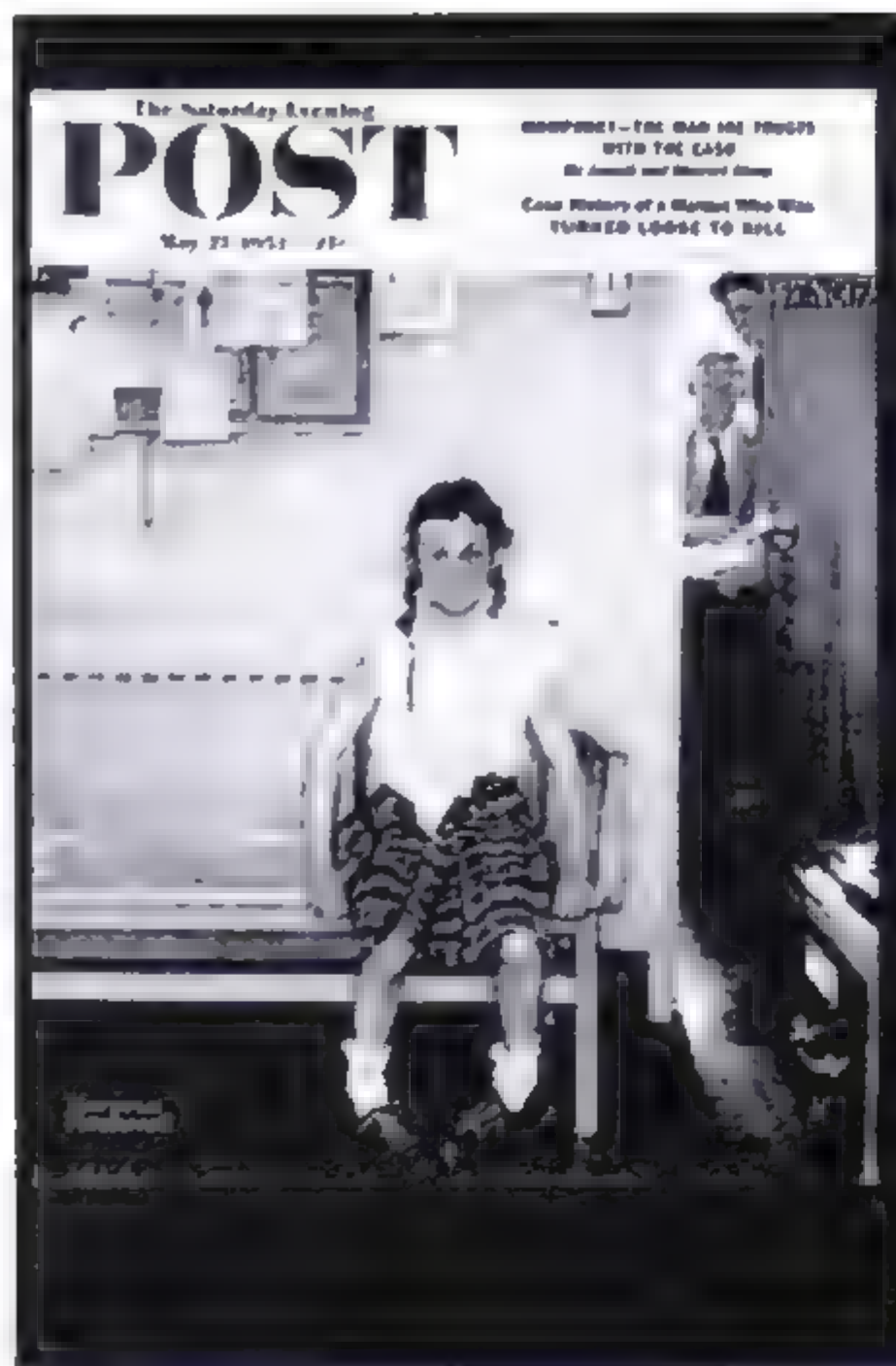
Skottie: Sometimes I really want to work with people that I admire and have followed from a young fan until now. But other times I don't want to see the Wizard behind the

curtain. You know, I want to always see them as this "being" that brings me entertainment. Sometimes that bubble can get burst when you start haggling over "change this panel, leave room for this balloon, do you really think this works there", etc. All of the sudden they become real and a little bit of the fanboy dies...haha. It's a strange world, I know. But there are some writers out there that I wouldn't mind getting a script from. **Jason Aaron** kicks all types of ass. **Brian Wood** and **Brian Azzarello** are two of my favorites at the moment. Now that I've been writing, there are some guys I would love to write a script for. **Eric Canete** would probably top the list. This guy is a monster and I don't think that anyone in this industry understands movement like him. He's the kind of artist that could truly draw anything you write...**ANYTHING**. **Jerome Opena** is another guy that has such life and mood in his work that it would be a pleasure to work with him.

Sketch: What's the best thing about the comics creating process for you?

Skottie: Creating something from nothing. I sound like a broken record, but now that I have had the chance to handle everything from writing to the art, it truly feels like crafting a world from the ground up. Drawing is fun, but doing both is just amazing. I get to take a white sheet of paper and turn into living, breathing, thinking characters. What a job!!

If I need to be more specific then it would have to be those few beginning stages. The part where things are all about the idea and the energy of sketching and capturing the general concept of the story. That's where it's all instinct and from the gut. It's all fun, but



sometimes the later parts, the finishes can get a little mechanical. I love the parts that no one will see, like the breakdowns to a page. It's there to show the gestures, the idea, the rough emotions that the story will later hinge on. It's a great time that not a lot of fans ever get to really see or experience.

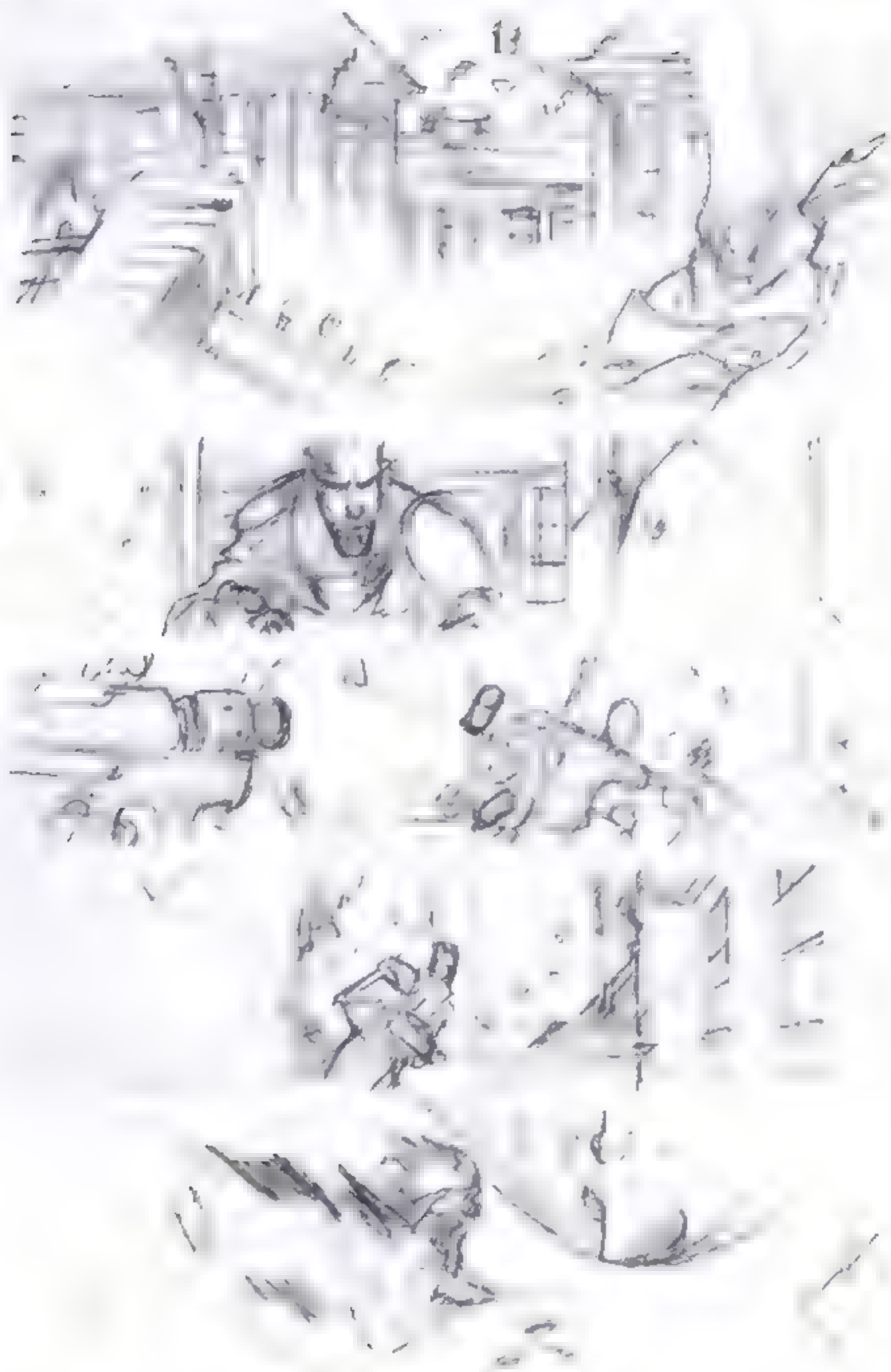
Sketch: What sparks your imagination, Skottie? What inspires you?

Skottie: What doesn't. Corny answer, right? But it's true. I think it's more about being open to letting different things inspire you. Over the years I've tried to look farther than just comics for my inspiration. I've been reading a ton of novels lately and that has done wonders for the imagination. Music always plays a huge role for me as well. Sometimes the right track will spin an entire story line, or character design. It really can

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trigger the moods inside and let them spill out thru the pen.

Sketch: What else would you like to tackle? Any characters come to mind?

Skottie: There aren't a lot of characters that I'm dying to take a stab at. That's not to say that I wouldn't love to do them, I just can't ever think of them when asked. For someone that has worked at Marvel for my entire comic book career, I'd probably get a call if I said Batman...haha. I would love to do a *Batman* book one day. I love that world, and his villains are the coolest on the planet.

Outside of that, I think there are a lot of my own stories that I'm dying to tell. There's part of me that feels

that once someone works on a character and I love it, then there's no reason for me to take a stab at it. But I think there are a ton of new stories out there to be told and hopefully I'll play apart in that in years to come.

Sketch: What's your day like? Is it a tight schedule or something loose?

Skottie: It varies really. When I first started out, I was spending like 12 hours a day drawing. Most of that was because I just wasn't good enough and it took me hours to get it right. Part of it was I didn't have much of a process and I was always trying something out.

Now, I've got at least a few things figured out and I try my best to keep regular work hours. Get up

around 8 and go to the gym. Get in the studio around 9:30 and work until 5:30 or 6. This helps me keep at least a foot in the real world with real people...haha. Before I would get lost in comics and drawing and forgot about everything. That became pretty lonely, pretty fast. Now I can sit and watch movies with my lady at a normal hour. I can get a few hours of daylight. But most of all, I can maintain interest in drawing and creating. Too much of it and you just burn yourself out.

Keeping that in mind, the schedules can change here and there. You do what you must to get it done. But more often than not I can keep fairly normal hours.

Sketch: What are some of the tools you use? Any particular

brands you prefer?

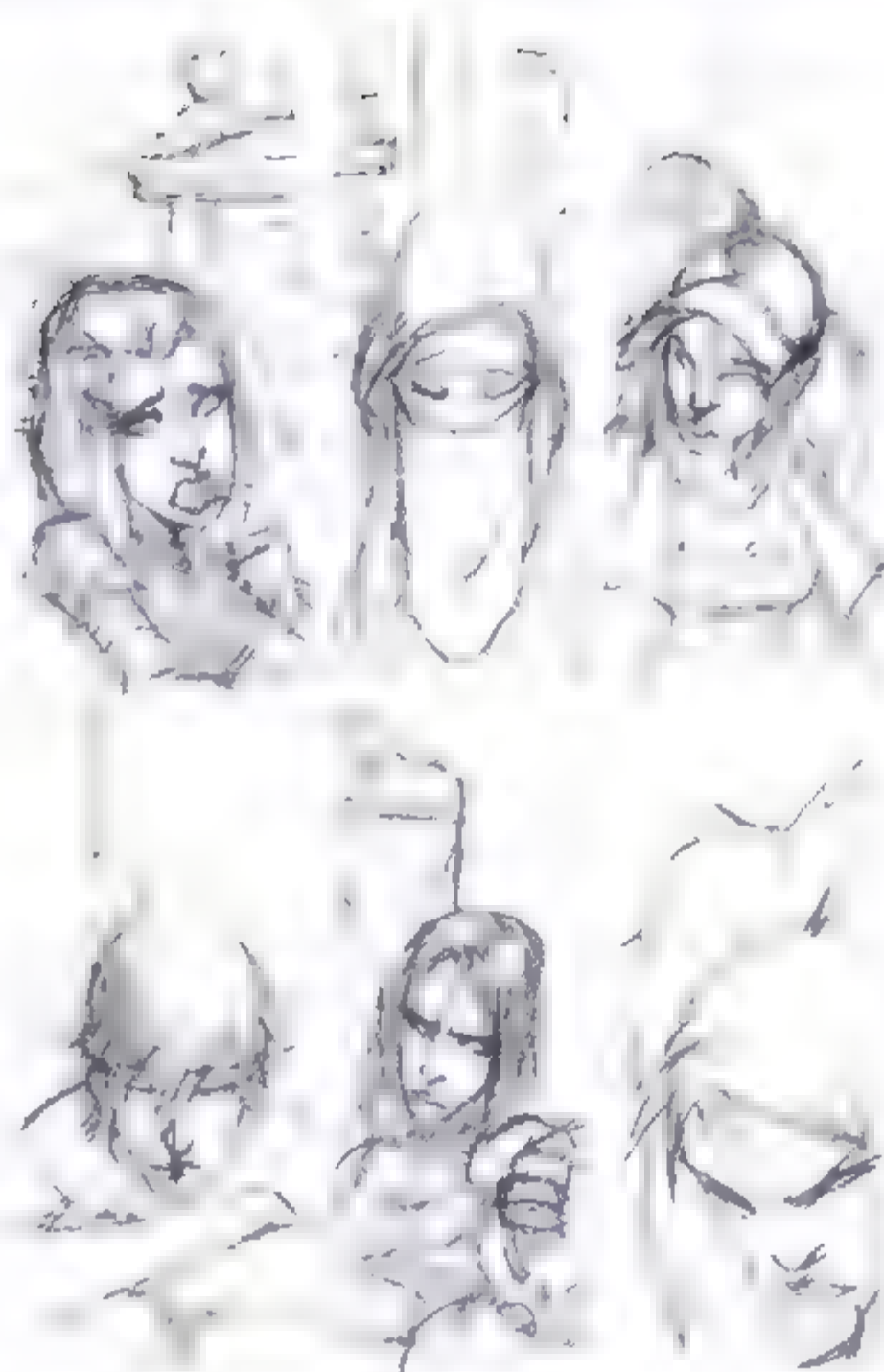
Skottie: I used to think that one day I would find that magic pencil and I would draw so much better because of it. I used to think that if I didn't use the highest quality paper then it wouldn't be the best. Lately, I've been drawing with what ever pencil is closest and on printer paper. For me, the cheaper the material, the less I care about messing up, which actually helps me to not mess up. Funny how that works, right? If I am drawing on 3 ply Bristol that cost an arm and leg, then I tend to be hesitant with my lines and that makes for potentially boring art. If I'm working on paper that costs next to nothing then I never worry about wasting it and my drawing becomes more daring and free. I find I can reach farther if I'm not concerned with wasting good material.

Now, after the drawing stage I do ink on the good stuff. But the hardest part is done. It's more about having fun pushing ink around.

I will try and give you tools though. I do most of my drawing with Prismacolor's Col-Erase Blue. I like the way the lead lays on the paper. For inking I've been using a lot of brush pens. Pentel makes a pretty good brush pen that has refillable ink. The brush has synthetic bristles so you can do a lot of effects just like a real brush.

The one thing I've learned is that you will always want to change your tools. I've hunted for the magic pencil, pen, brush, etc. and I will continue to hunt. I try to not get too wrapped up in the tools because you will only be forced to live with disappointment.

Sketch: How do you approach a page or a whole story?



Skottie: After reading or writing the script, I do thumbnails for the book. I prefer to do the whole book at once. Doing this allows me to see the whole story at once and get a feel for how it flows. I have a scan of the Marvel board and I use that for thumbnails. I used to put a bunch of them on 11x17 paper and print them out. Each only about 3 inches tall. Now I do them in the computer using my Wacom Tablet. It's all about story and speed at this stage so I don't even think about designs or details. It's just about placement and movement here.

Once that stage is done, I scale them up to about print size (10.5x7) and print them out with a really light blue tint. I then start working out the actual drawing. A lot of people draw on the 11x17 board, full size. I find that to be too big for keeping the energy and proportions right. Smaller areas are easy to see and control at this stage. I'm still not overly concerned with detail at this point. I ink myself so I keep that until later. I



just go thru the entire issue and do rough drawings.

I scan these in and scale them up to the full size Marvel board and print them out again, and again with the light blue. Now I start inking. The reason for leaving out a ton of detail in the earlier stages is to keep each stage interesting. If I pencil every minute detail, then what will be fun about inking? I like to still have some decisions to make during the inking stage.

Once I finish the inks, I scan that in. I've mentioned the printing of the light blue and this is why. When I scan in my inked page I can easily adjust the image and make the underlying blue disappear. This saves me time and energy by not having to erase all the pencil lines underneath the ink lines. I like to be economic with my time. I want as much of the workday spent doing actual creative things. I used to use the lightbox, and ink on my actual pencils, and all the other traditional ways of working, but found that I was getting burnt out on things that didn't really involve



anything creative. It was robot stuff. So, I invested in a large scanner and large printer and had the robots do the robot stuff and I'll do the fun stuff. You can ask a few friends who have adopted my process; it shaves hours off your day.

Once all the line art is ready, either I color it up in Photoshop or I send it to my colorist Jean to finish it off.

Sketch: How do you feel about art school and formal training?

Skottie: It's hard for me to have an informed opinion simply because I didn't go to college. I wanted to desperately, but I was always too afraid to take out loans. There are some artists that I know who went to art school and they really benefited from it. Others not so much. I think it's all about your desire to learn and what you want to learn. There is nothing wrong with wanting to learn, and I will always put myself thru one form of school or another on a daily basis.

Sketch: Do you have favorites that you follow, whether it's a creator or a title?

Skottie: Right now I love *DMZ*. The story is fantastic and the art is a blast. I've also been on this old school kick and bought the mega-editions of *Spawn* that Image has been putting out. **Greg Capullo** is one of the greats and I love having all those kick-ass issues in giant collections.

There are a lot of creators that I will pick things up from. **Jason Pearson** is close to god like status for me so I will buy anything with his name on it. I could list a million names but you can go back to the "influences" question and copy and paste. I do love art and sketch-books though. I love seeing the behind the scenes sketches and doodles. It's almost like going to school in a way and getting in to that particular artists head.

Sketch: Full script or a plot. How do you like to work?

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Megan Gwynn

"PIXIE"

Age 14

Skottie: Full script works for me. I've only worked from a plot one time in my whole career. I like knowing what the writer has in mind and it allows me to see what the characters are going to say. That informs me on how to make them act out the scene. Unless I'm drawing my own script, I don't know how I could do my best work without knowing everything the writer knows. I don't like guessing.

Sketch: How do you feel about inking and the other aspects of the process?

Skottie: I love it. When I was only penciling, I hated the other aspects because nothing every came back to

me the way I wanted it. It doesn't mean that the inkers and colorist that I worked with weren't talented, because they were. I just think that every artist has a vision in his or her head and it's too hard to hope someone else can read your mind. I quickly started inking myself and then started coloring as well. I think it helped me become a better artist as well. I couldn't hide behind someone else's work. It forced me to think about each stage and make sure it all worked. There's nothing more heartbreaking than seeing a page come back and it being nowhere near what you expected. I'm sure it was no picnic for the inkers and colorists that worked with me either. I'm not



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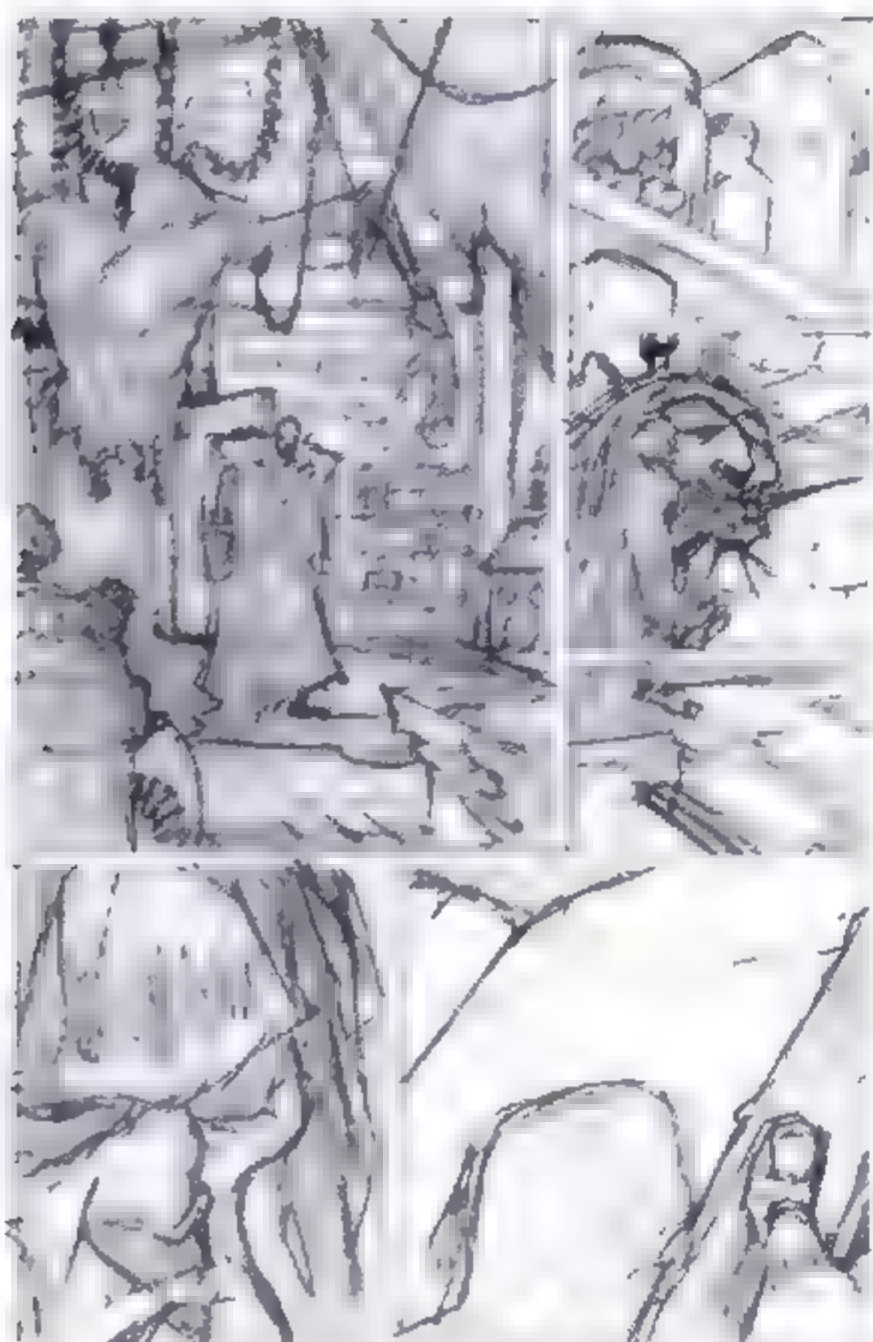
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known for holding my tongue...haha.

Sketch: Do you still have mentors in the business?

Skottie: Mike Wieringo would probably be the closest to a mentor and I still didn't think of him that way. I think he was a mentor to me without either of us knowing it. He as a great friend and we both had similar goals. He didn't know it, but he had achieved all his goals already. That's what made him great. He had all this success, drawn every character out there, had a successful creator-owned book and still talked like he just got in the business last year. He would make me feel like I was something he aspired to be and that always drove me to work harder. He'll be missed!

Josh Middleton is one of my closest friends and while I don't consider him to be a mentor, he has always played a huge role in my goals. He and I can spend hours rambling on and on about ideas, crazy high goals, pushing ourselves artistically, etc. I think having

someone like that to help push you can be more important than having a mentor. You're in the same place, trying to achieve the same things, and it can help give you the strength, inspiration, ideas, etc. to go to the next level.

Sketch: How do you feel about being an influence yourself?

Skottie: It's hands-down the strangest thing about this job. A lot of artists will tell you that they hate looking at anything they've done a few months later, let alone a few years. So to have someone say that my *Human Torch* series is a great influence on them 6 years after the fact...I get a little sick. In my mind, I hope that some people forget about that...haha. I just want it to go away. It's not because it's bad, but I've grown so much since then and I've learned a lot about the craft that I just didn't have then.

On the other hand, it's about the coolest thing ever. To read an email from a fan that puts your name in a list with people I worship just blows my mind. I don't think I'll ever get used to it. I used

to read *Sketch Magazine* and try to soak in every word and to think that now I'm the one someone else will be reading about. Blowing my mind! Haha. Luckily, there are enough people out there that have a few choice things to say about my work that I don't think I could ever get too big of a head.

Sketch: What's the easiest part of all this?

Skottie: I'm not sure if any of it is easy. It's a lot of things, but I don't think easy can be said anywhere in it. Even the interviews aren't easy...which you can probably tell from the amount time it's taken me to get the thing done. "Ha Ha".

Sketch: The hardest?

Skottie: Turning it all off. It took me years to stay away from message boards and to not read my own reviews. I don't care what anybody says, when someone blasts you, you feel it. You can read 100 positive reviews or comments, but 1 person says they don't like what you did and it's over. We're all egomaniacs...haha.



We need every single person to love us. Maybe we just need more hugs. But once I walked away from all that, I found myself being ok with just drawing for me and not caring if it pleases everyone else or not.

Sketch: From the start to the finish, how much does a project change or grow? What influences that?

Skottie: It really depends. The projects that I've been a part of have always been pretty mapped out from the beginning. I think that the art can sometimes help guide the story a little but for me, things have been pretty laid out.

Sketch: What is something you'd like to share about yourself with the readers of *Sketch Magazine*?

Skottie: I don't actually know that much about comics...haha. Isn't that terrible? I read a lot of 90's comics, but when people start talking about the history of just about any character I know nothing. I mean, I know Peter Parker was bit by a spider and Batman watch his parents die, but not much past that. I started reading comics when Image started and we all know how a lot of that went down...haha. My friends take digs a lot because I can't hold my own in a comic book discussion. I told this to **Robert Kirkman** and he replied, "Yeah, I figured that about

you...you're a jock type aren't you?" I don't watch one single sport. I haven't been to a live sporting event in about 9 years. I just got into comics late and only read what I think will be interesting. It's funny; people think I don't like comic books because I don't read every monthly that comes out. I treat comics like I treat novels and movies. I read what I think I will like.

Oh, and I love the TV show *Felicity*.

Sketch



A "Mary Sue" is a particular kind of character that turns up over and over again in fan fiction. Try to come up with characters that don't quickly pop into your mind, working instead toward ideas that will truly surprise readers. In "Dead Kid," our Police Officer Loretta, perpetually in drag because of some mysterious "undercover" assignment, might be about as far from a Mary Sue as you can get.

The Universe at Your Finger Tips

Thoughts on Scripting Comic Books

"Mary Sues" and Other Rookie Mistakes

by Tom Bierbaum

If you read much fan fiction, you probably know what a "Mary Sue" is.

She's an all-too-typical character from fans who're just starting to write their own fiction. Generally she's a thinly disguised stand-in for the author, but in idealized form — an amazing person, beloved by all, who's super-competent and super-empathetic, but who's also got some haunting or tragic aspect to her past. She's generally inserted into an established universe and quickly over-shadows the existing heroes of that universe.

There are other details. A Mary Sue is often the long-lost daughter or sister of a star character. She

sometimes dies a tragic death and is mourned profoundly by one and all.

And there's really nothing wrong with this character, except that you see it over and over in the world of fan fiction. It feels fresh and exciting to everyone who thinks of it, but, unfortunately, just about everyone thinks of it.

Mary Sues are largely a phenomenon of amateur writers and women writers at that. And we're here to talk about breaking into pro writing in the still-male-dominated world of comics, so there may not be a lot of obvious relevance to this topic. But let's look at Mary Sues as a symbol of common rookie mistakes and see what lessons they hold for how those mis-

ARTBOOKS

takes can be avoided. Here are a few of the broader missteps that Mary Sues represent:

1.) Writing a Cliché.

Much of what we find tiresome today was at one point fresh and different, but over time became predictable and repetitious as writers lost sight of how much time had passed since a particular innovation was truly innovative. To this day, we hear comedy writers boasting that they're breaking out of the mold of "Leave It To Beaver" and "Ozzie and Harriet," seemingly unaware that they're boldly moving beyond an approach that was the comedy standard a full half-century ago. A lot of comic writers seem similarly impressed with themselves if they're reacting against the comics that were popular 50 years ago. If you want to be fresh and innovative, make sure you're reacting to what's common in the comic shops today.

For example, back in the early decades of the comic industry, superhero and adventure comics were mostly aimed at young boys and highlighted male heroes almost exclusively. When publishers began to aim super-heroes at older readers, coincidentally about the same time the feminist movement was starting to impact the culture at large, female heroes began to get their share of the spotlight and sometimes came to over-shadow the established male characters. A Mary Sue-like focus on a female character was revolutionary in 1970 and 1980, but it hasn't been fresh and different now for decades. That doesn't mean there's anything wrong with female characters dominating the spotlight. It just means you better tell a good, inventive story as you're doing it, because a focus on females isn't in itself new and innovative anymore.

So how do you tell the difference between what's become a tired cliché and what's an approach that deserves to be repeated because it really works for the audience? Maybe the easiest way to handle the question is, when you're taking a common, commercially successful approach, make sure you're doing it in a way that keeps surprising the readers. Give them the kind of story they seem to love, but with enough twists that they can't predict where it's going. Because another Mary Sue-ish mistake can be...

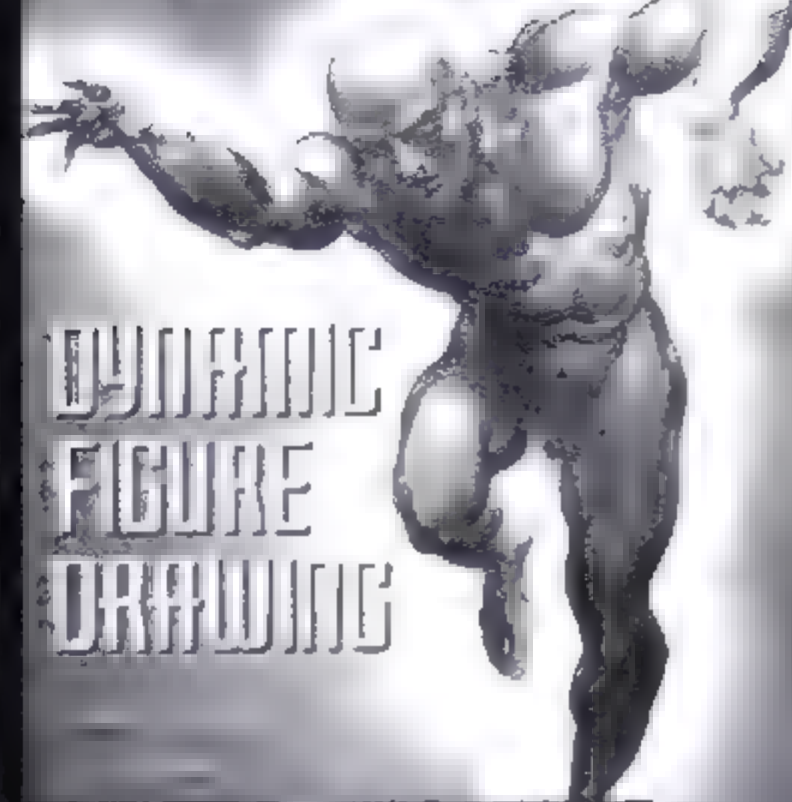
2.) Going With Your First Instincts.

We're often told to follow our first instincts and in many facets of life, that's good advice. But when you're starting out as a writer, it often leads to ideas that are the same ones everyone else is thinking of. When a character pops into your head, take a hard look at how creative it really is. Don't be afraid to re-think the concept a few times and surprise yourself with a few twists you wouldn't have seen coming, so you have a better chance of surprising the reader. This can especially work when you take an initial idea and guide it closer to interesting personalities you've actually observed in real life, so this character's storylines develop and evolve in real-world ways that reflect your unique experiences.

3.) Writing Yourself Into the Story.

While we all probably enjoy a story more when we can identify with one or more of the characters, centering your tale on a thinly disguised version of yourself, especially if you're writing an established concept with established protagonists, generally comes across as self-indul-

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gent. Try to find more elegant ways to inject your perspective and participation into the story than literally and obviously putting yourself at the center of it.

4.) Inventing Super-Formidable Characters.

When you're adding to an existing universe, respect the established power structure of that universe and the abilities of the characters who've already put the concept on the map. Don't bring in a new love interest or arch-villain or brash recruit who's instantly more impressive and competent than all the established characters.

That's not to say every universe can't stand to be shaken up by newcomers who challenge the heroes and sometimes eclipse them altogether. But as a rookie writer, it's not your place to create those kind of game-changing characters. Establish yourself with some great stories and great writing and then it *will* be your place.

5.) Making Major Additions to the Series' Background.

Don't invent lost daughters the hero never knew he had, or siblings he never mentioned, or mentors the reader never met before. This is, once again, an example of something the veteran writers can handle when they've earned their stripes and have a real sense of the concept and its history.

When you're just starting out and still learning the ropes, pride yourself on approaches that organically co-exist within the established structure of the concept. Come up with ideas that build upon or deepen what we know, in the spirit of what's gone before. With a little success, you may quickly find yourself being instructed to shake things up and challenge the existing boundaries of a concept. One editor essentially told us that if we didn't have any ideas that didn't in some way become required reading and make a significant impact on the ongoing continuity of the series, then there was no real point in us doing a story for that series. But of course, that was after we'd established ourselves in the business, not before.

In our time on the "Legion of Super-Heroes," we were involved in a lot of stories that profoundly altered that concept and its history, and it's fair to say we weren't much more than rookie writers at that time. But most of those big changes were initiated by the artist/plotter Keith Giffen, who'd absolutely paid his dues and earned his opportunity to shake up the concept. And sometimes, we found ourselves in some cases actually trying to talk editors and collaborators out of changes that we weren't so sure about. Other times, we were probably, in fact, guilty of the trans-

gression I'm describing here – pursuing significant conceptual changes when we were still relative neophytes — though we certainly did it with a vast knowledge of and respect for the source material.

6.) Writing What You Think You're "Supposed" to Write.

Don't layer "meaningful" plotlines about child abuse or drug addiction or bigotry onto your stories because you think that's what good drama is supposed to involve.

If you *know* these topics, include them naturally by taking what you know and weaving it smoothly into well-conceived stories that really belong in the universe you're writing.

If you really don't know these topics, you're better off writing about not knowing them and how the world works from that perspective. Or educate yourself so you have real information to communicate. Superficial, uninformed depictions of these extremely weighty issues can come across as tiresome and annoying, especially within action-fantasy genres that are one or two steps removed from light juvenile entertainment.

There's nothing in the world wrong with characters whose lives haven't been directly touched by abuse or addiction or bigotry, especially if they come from writers who're writing what they know and not trying to write what they don't know.

The truth is, everyone has experienced difficulties that at some point seem close to insurmountable. If you need to write about scarred, struggling souls, be candid enough to explore your own scars with honesty rather than guessing what someone else's scars might be like.

7.) Forgetting What the Readers Are Looking For.

Understand and respect the established appeal of the concept you're working on and make sure your story is delivering it. Don't focus so much on your pet addition to this universe that it over-shadows the established aspects that have built the fan base you're addressing. Give them the payoff they've come to expect from this concept.

By all means, introduce fresh elements that truly reflect who you are as a writer, just do it with a deft touch and don't let those fresh elements overwhelm the vital aspects of the concept you're working on.

That's what it generally boils down to. Really think about the needs and expectations of the readers and how you can best meet them. That's the easiest way to avoid accidentally creating Mary Sue characters, or making any of the related mistakes they represent.

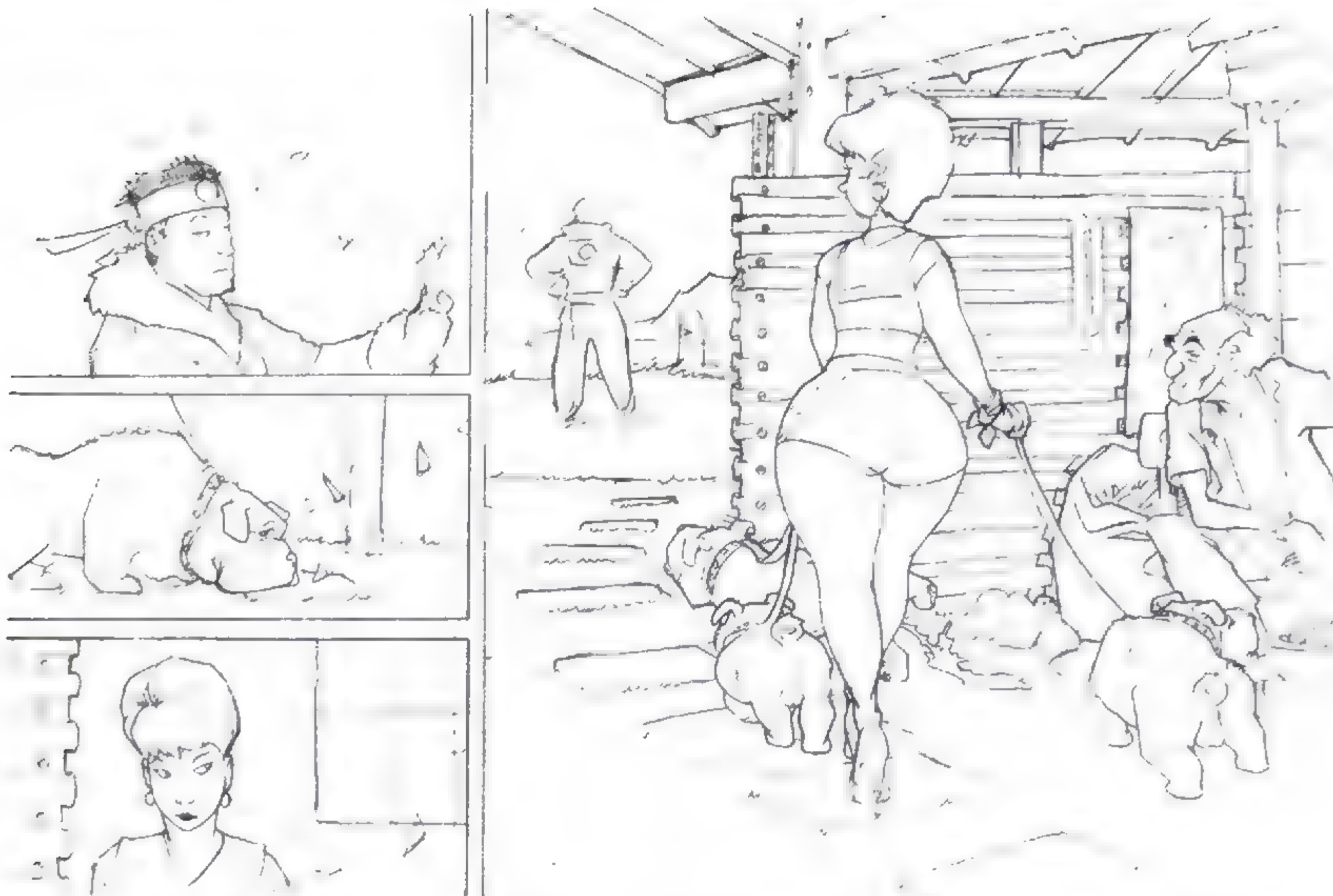


Notes to Draw From

Man On a Mission

by Mitch Byrd

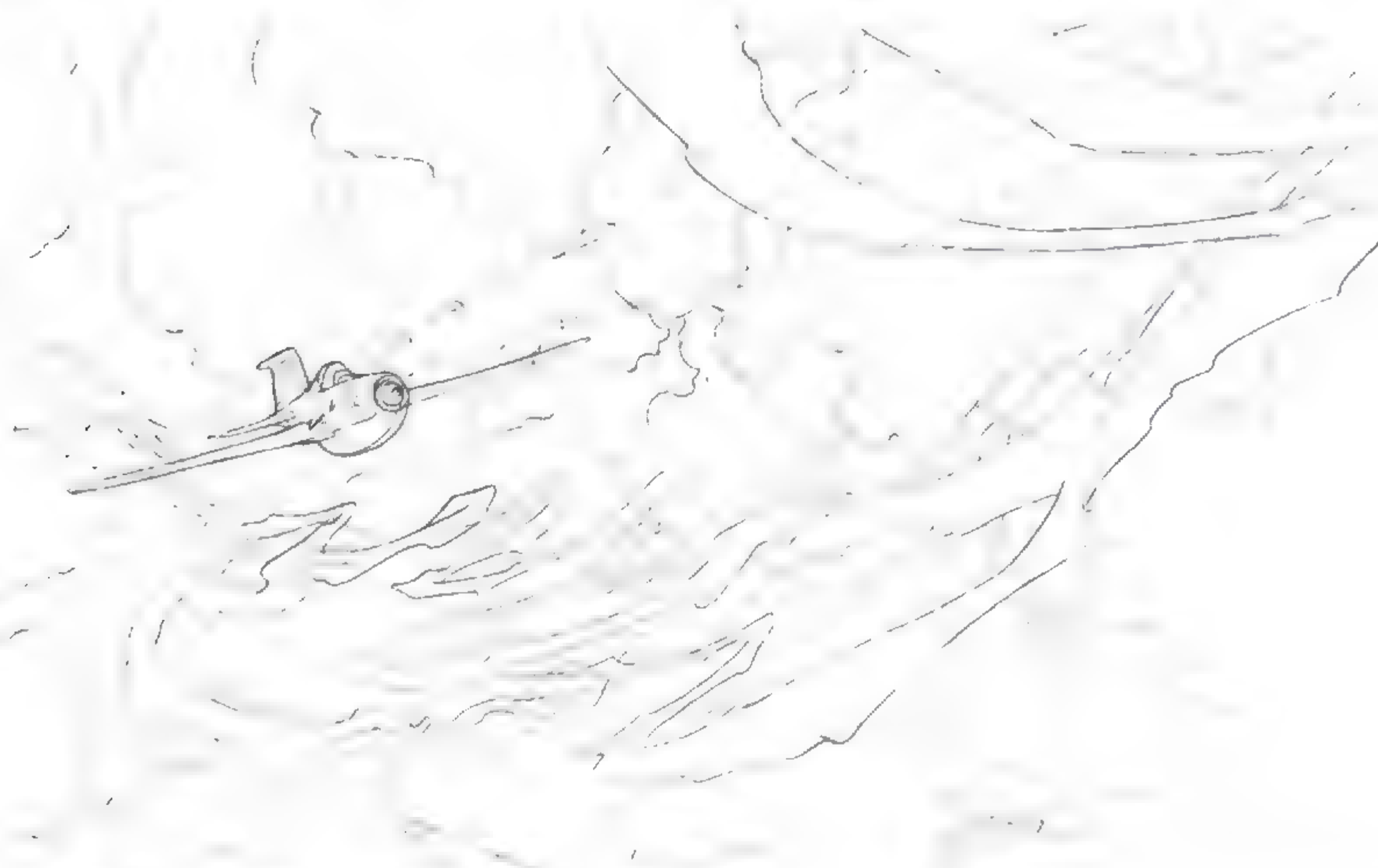
It's very easy for characters in a story to be overwhelmed by the "Stuff". You know, gadgets and fanciful things. You have to keep a weather eye that the people do not disappear in the technology. The tech stuff is fun to draw, just remember you're drawing it in the story for the characters to interact with. Contrast the nuances of a character's body language with the tech stuff's stiffness. When the two compete, it's generally best to let the characters win in graphic presence, even if the character loses to the machine in the storyline.



A

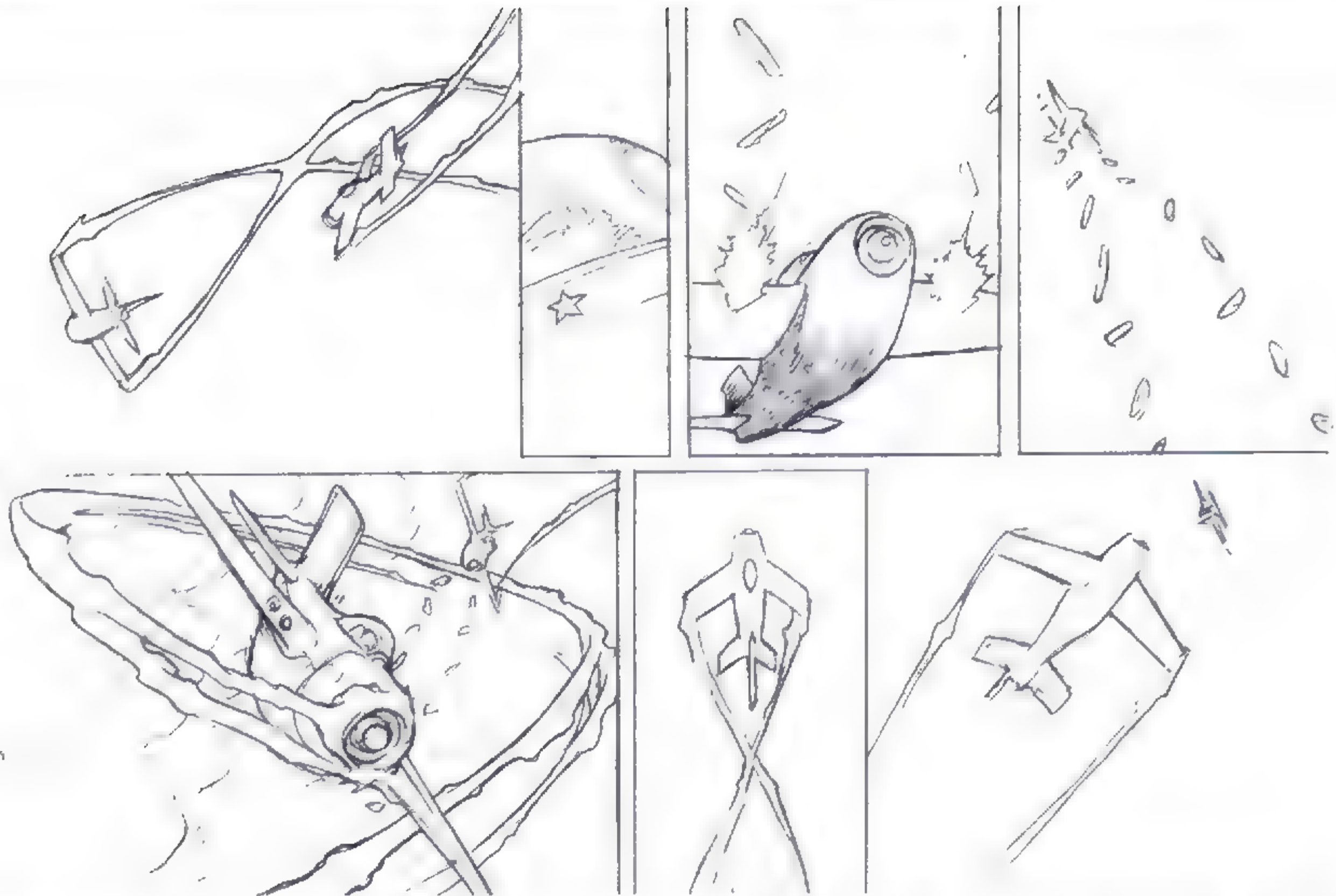
In the example layouts, from one of my many "prodjects", a Japanese fighter ace is working covertly in the Korean War. He flies the jet, the jet doesn't fly him. "Samurai Skies" would have been the title. Good title. What a waste.

My ego aside, when drawing the sample layouts, I need to keep the story about the ace, even though it's his jet we'll mostly see.

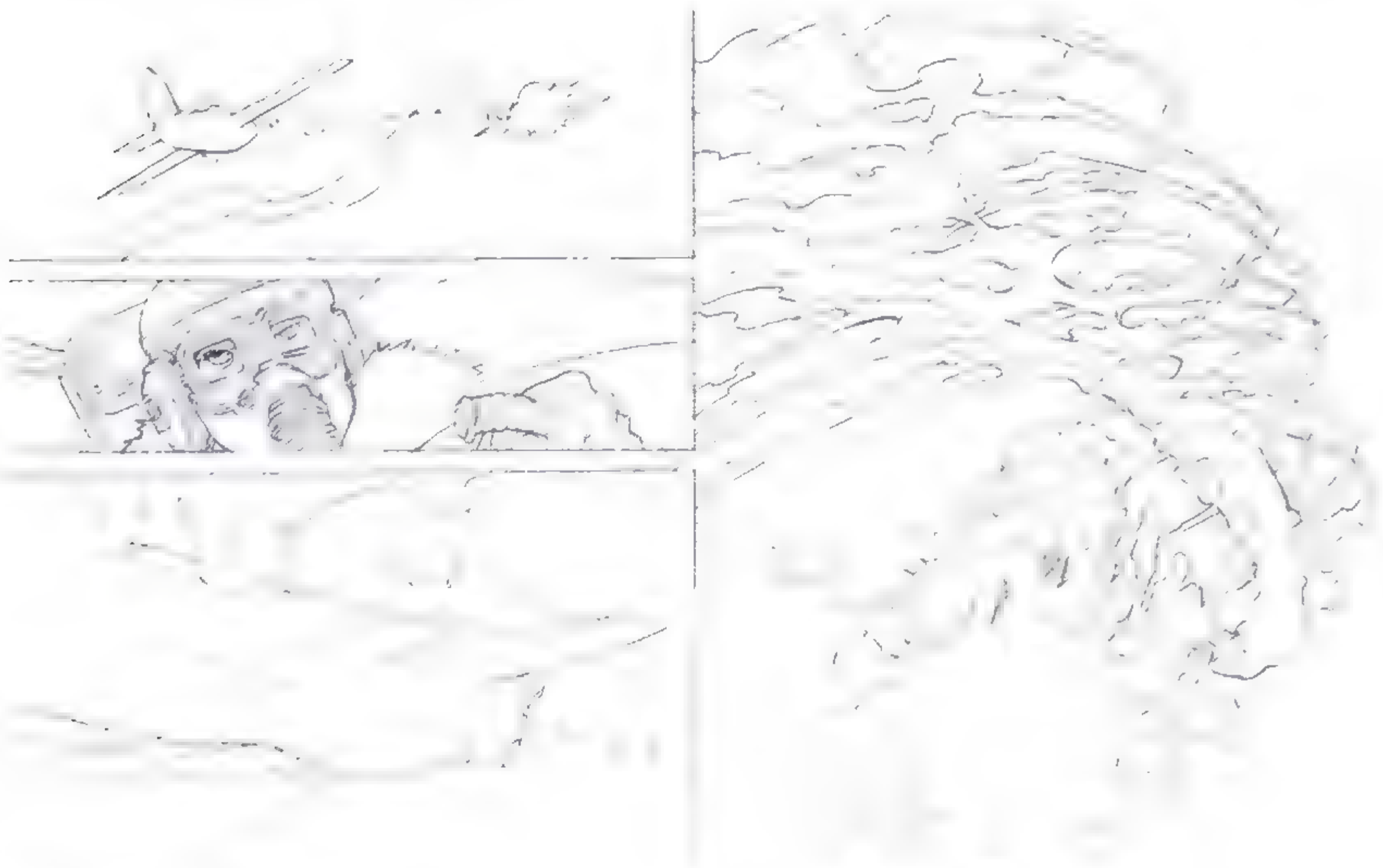


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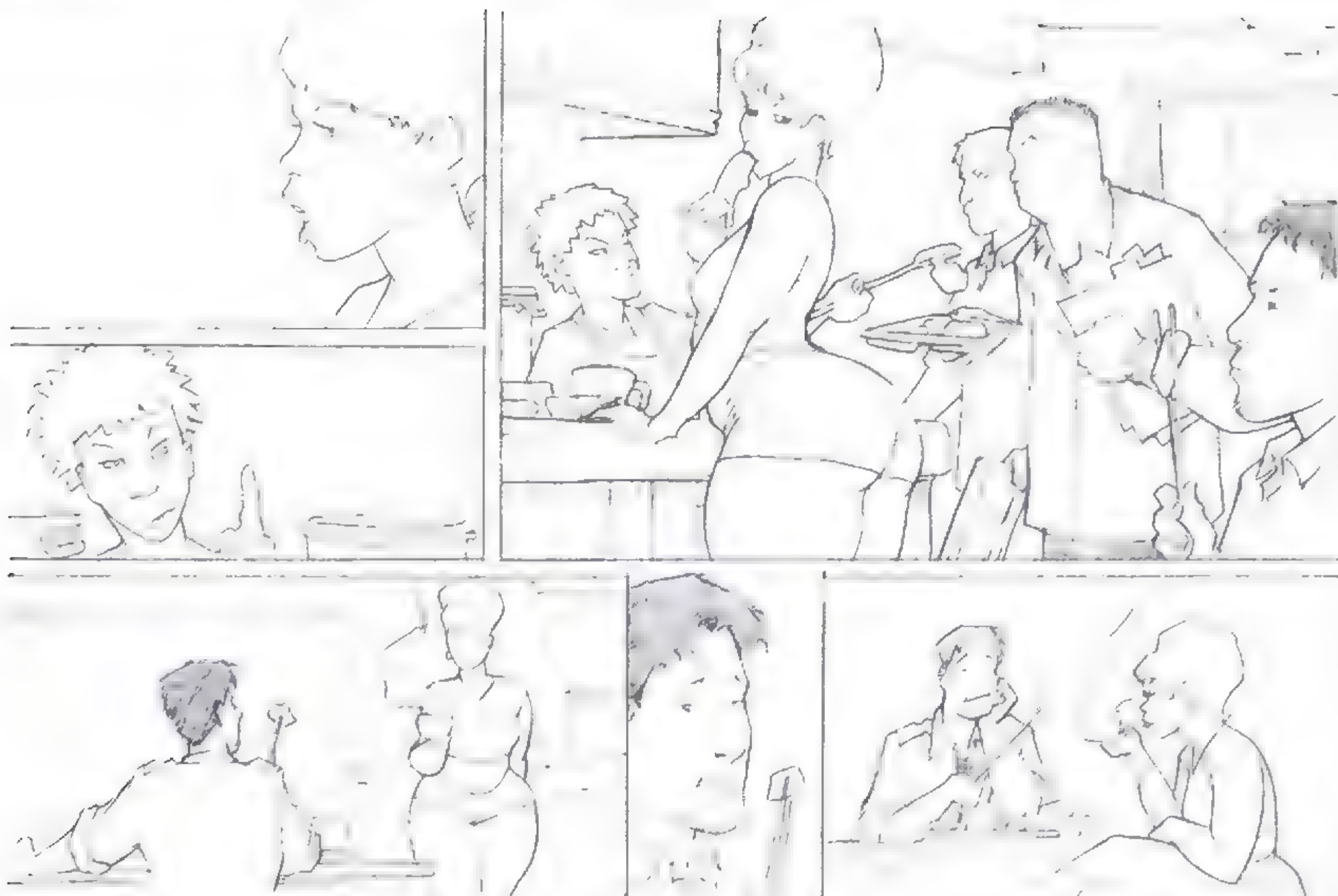
So how can I put the ace's attitude and character traits into the jet itself? He is flying it, so it seems reasonable to make it move and act like the ace.



C
One thing I thought I'd do is keep the jets in the dogfight a bit on the simple side of visual presentation. Simple, heck, they're practically silhouettes. I don't think I drew a bolt on them and I like drawing bolts on planes and things. But by keeping the jets simple, the telltales of movement through the air can stand out a little more. And the spiraling contrails of the ace's jet make his flying ability stand apart from his opponents.



D
Superior flying ability to be sure...



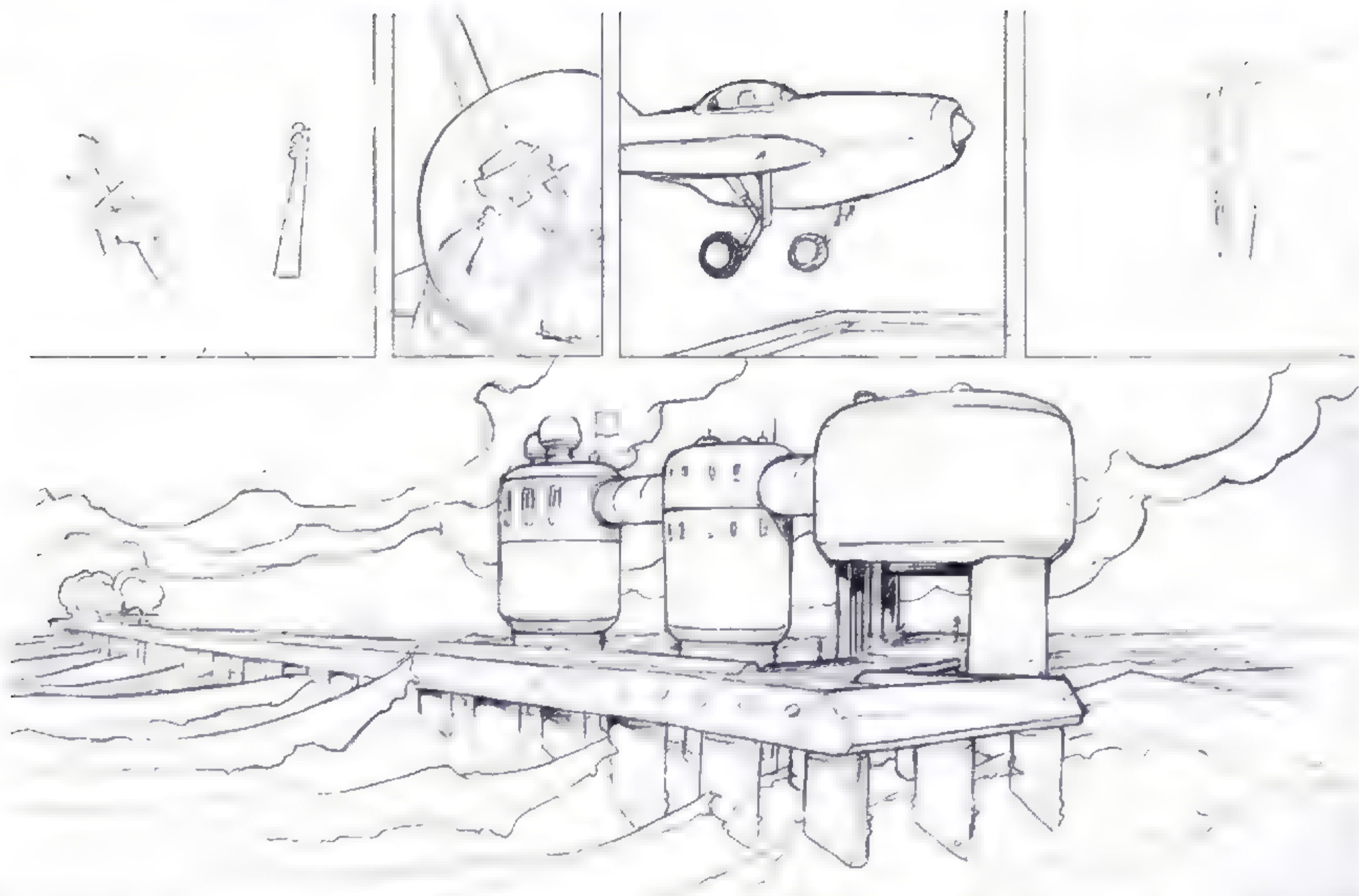
E

And then bring the pilot back to earth for some very human interaction with some, uh, humans. I get the feeling the dogfight was safer for the pilot than the cafeteria food.



F

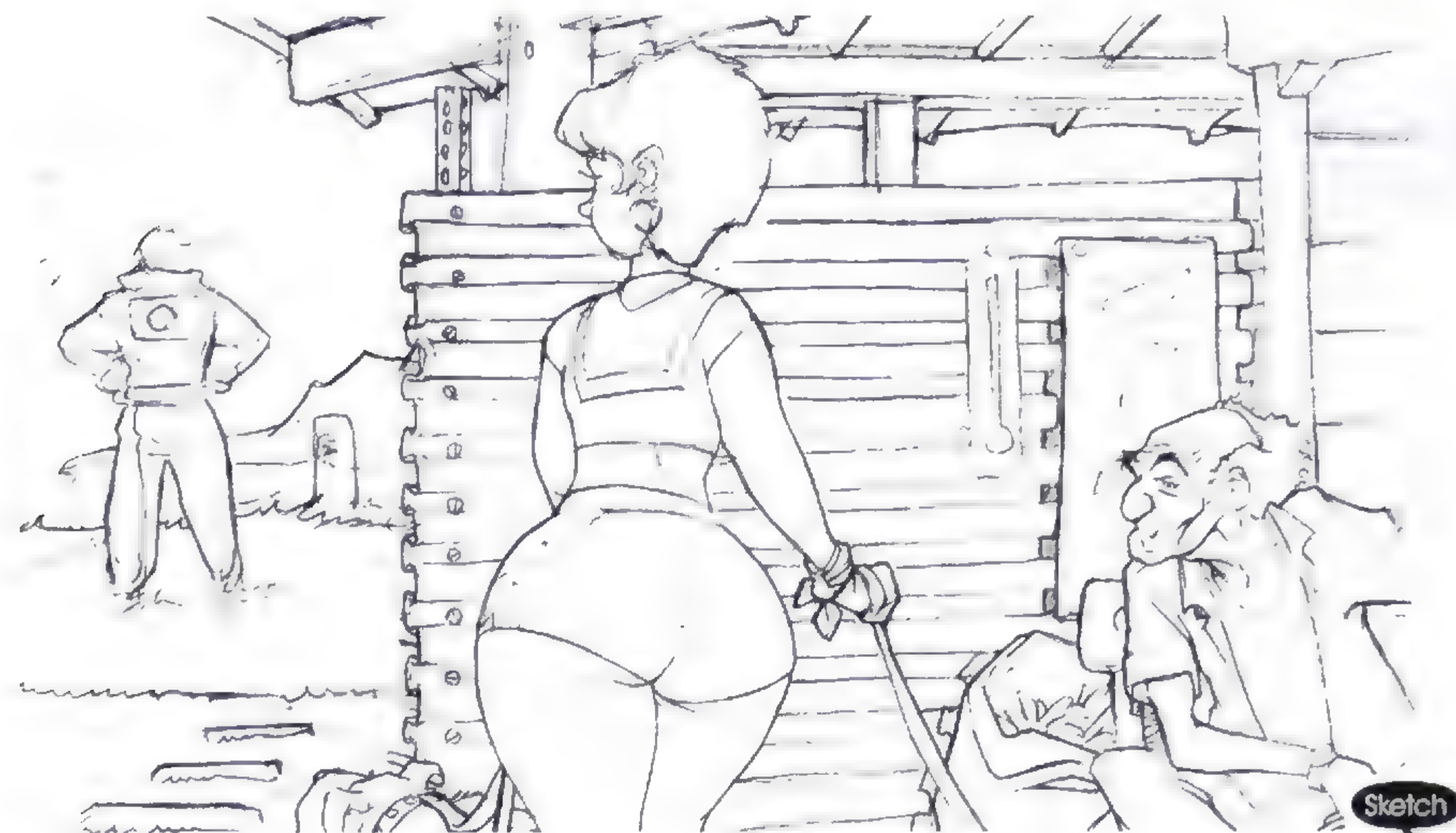
If the pilot isn't usually on the page, then his presence can still register in his commander's reaction to a radio transmission or his effect on ground targets as he flies away.



G

And our hero lands. Lands on the ultra-cool, super-secret concrete-fortified landing platform that is under water at high tide and really doesn't help explain what I'm trying to say but I just don't want it to go waste and...ego, boy, ego...

Just remember you have to find little ways to let the reader know which car your character is riding in. Or plane. Jet plane. Or ultra-cool landing platform that's only available at low tide.



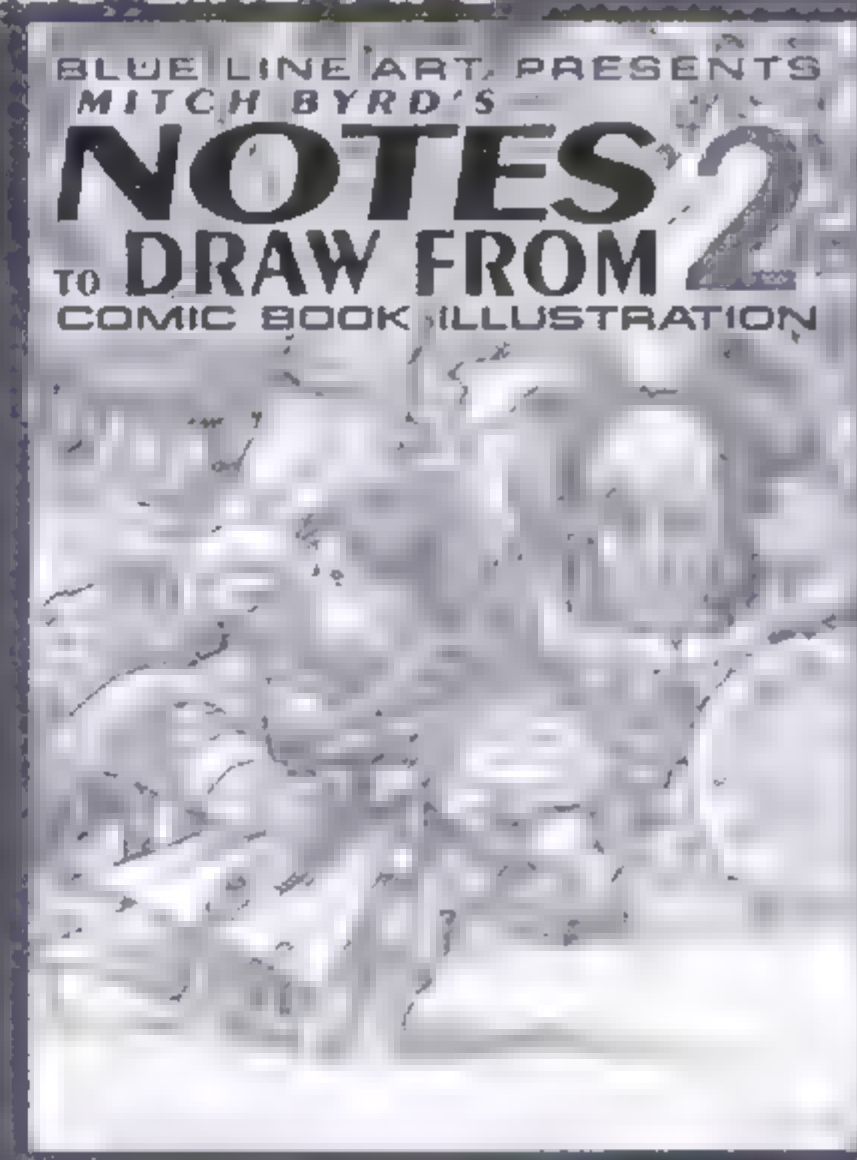
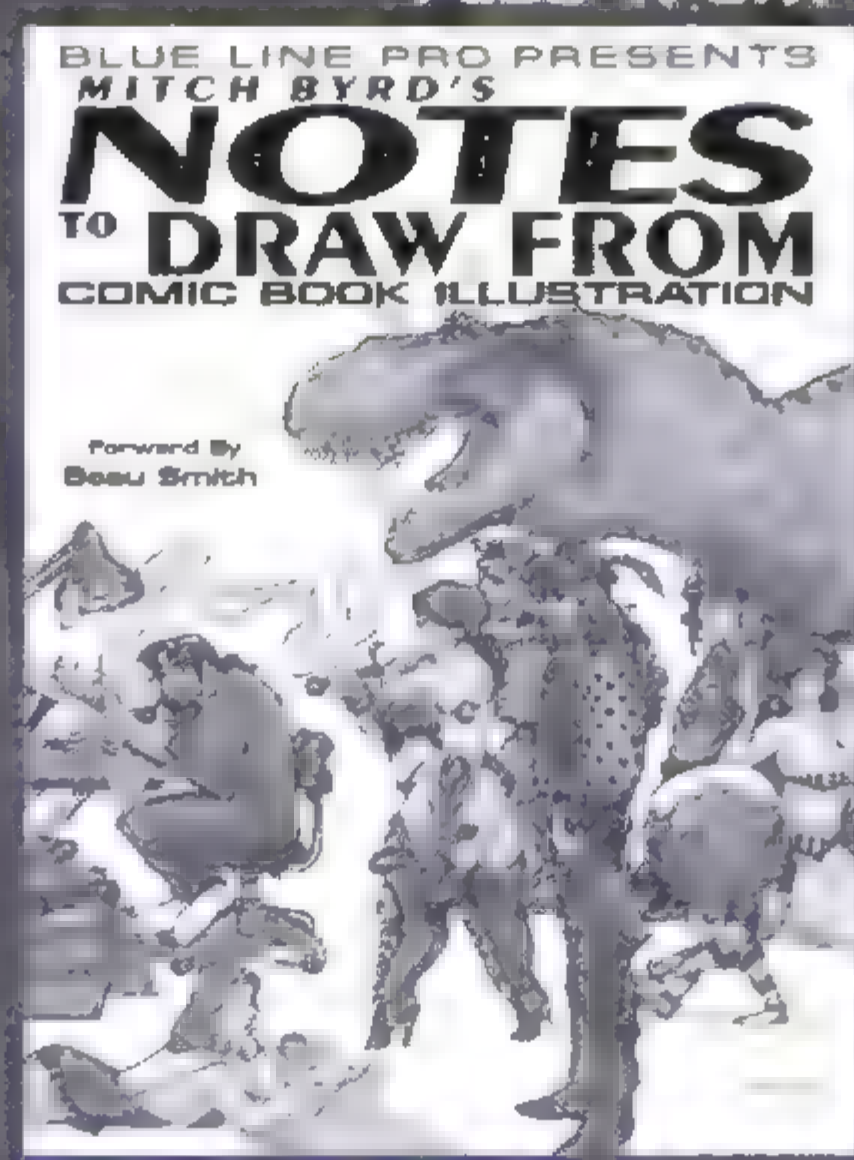
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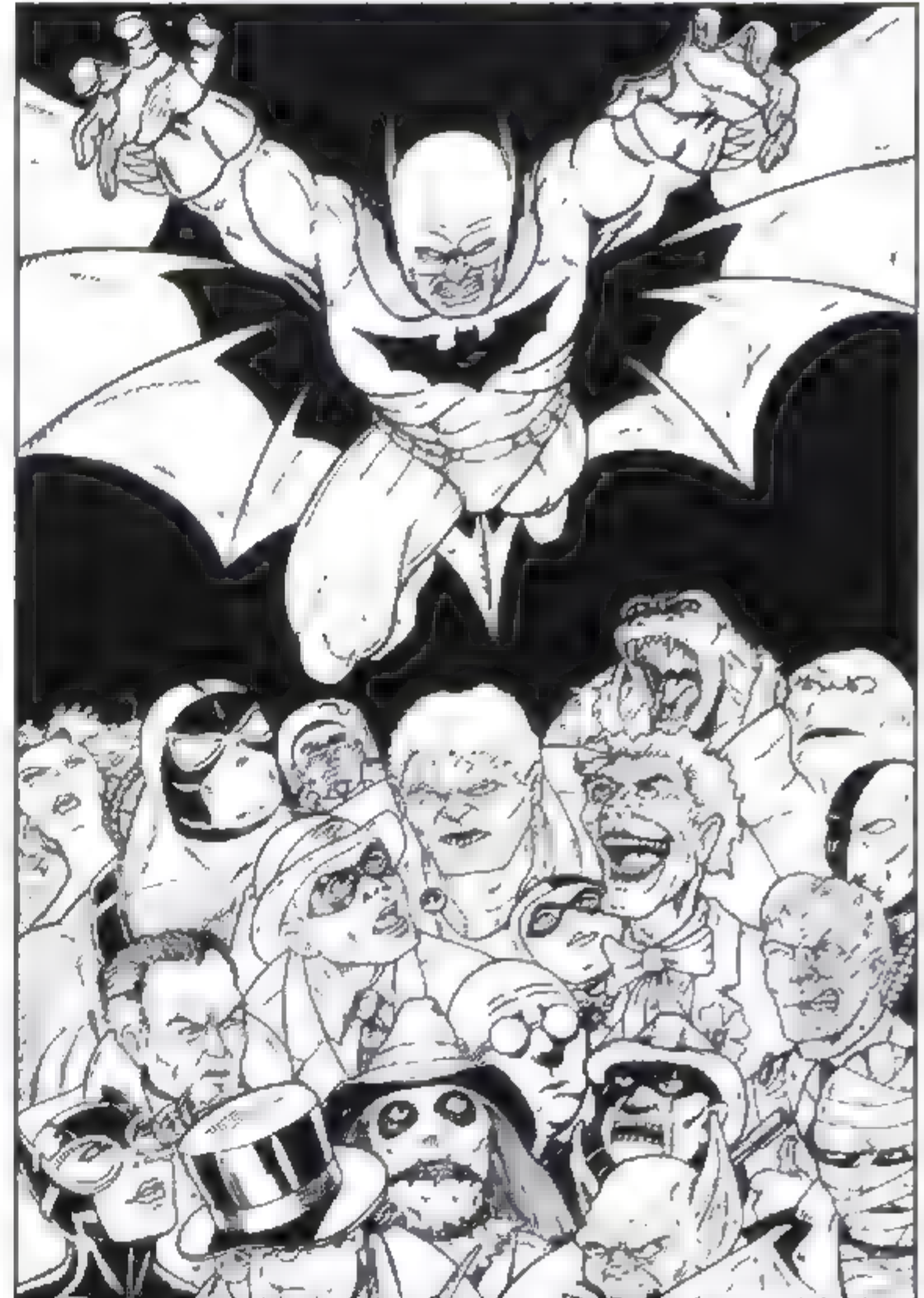
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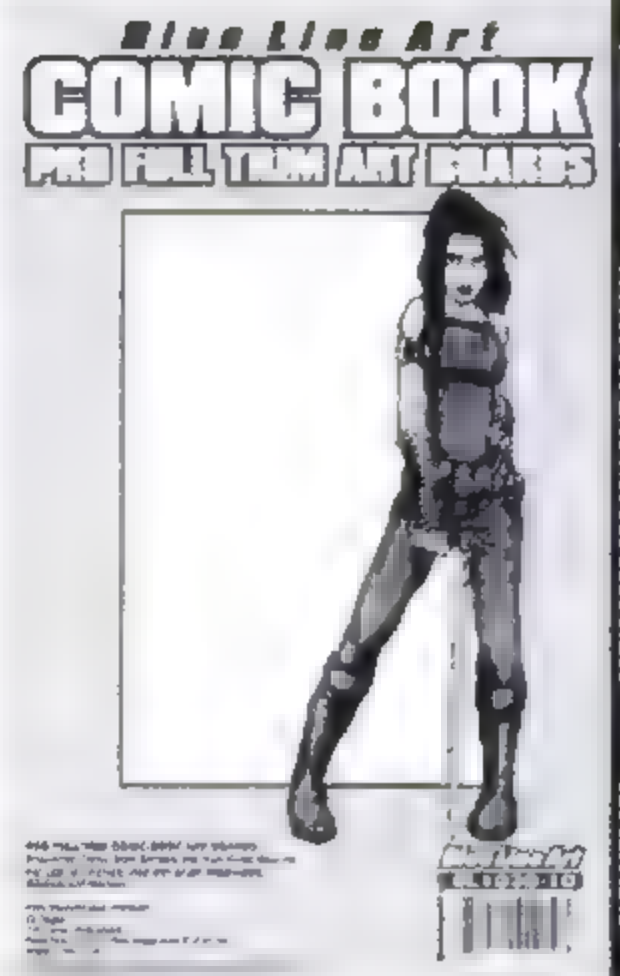
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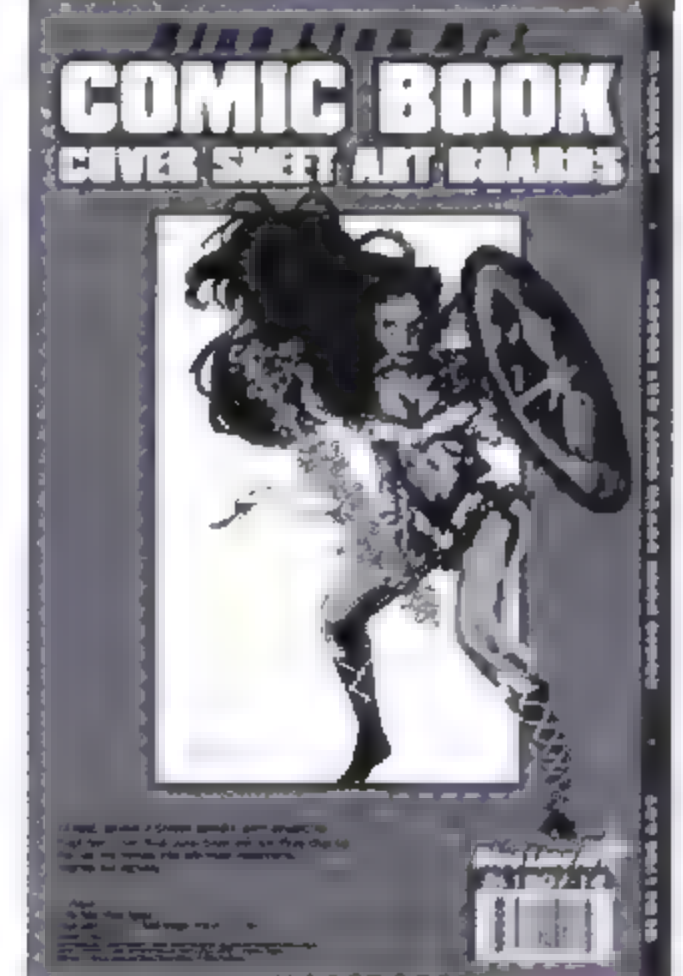
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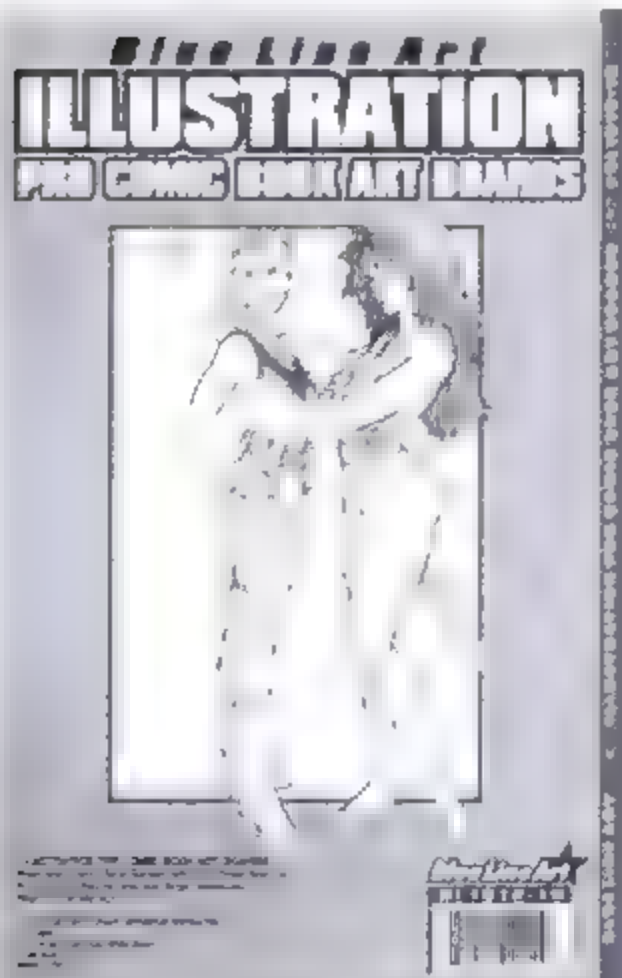
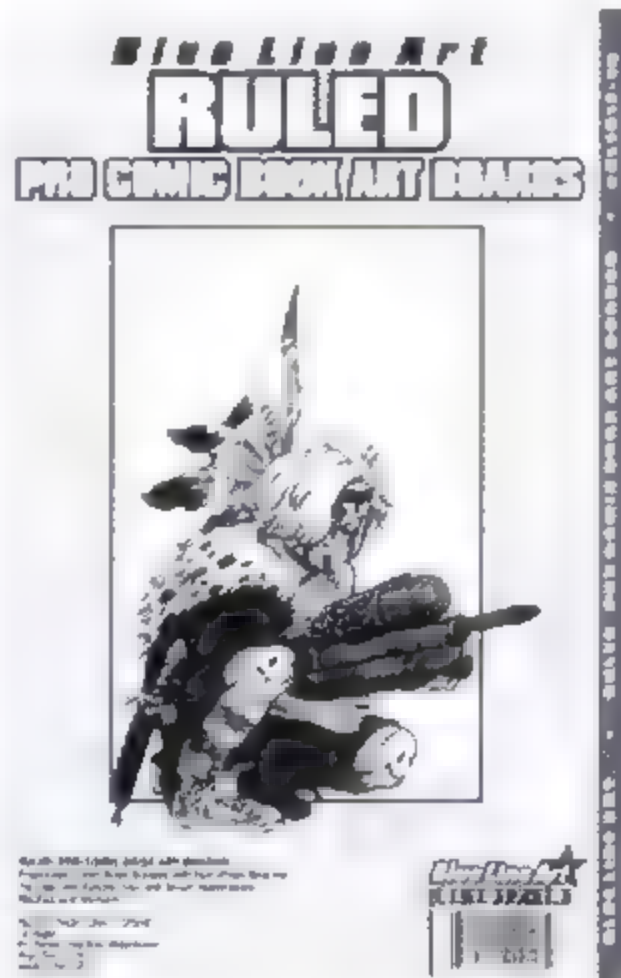
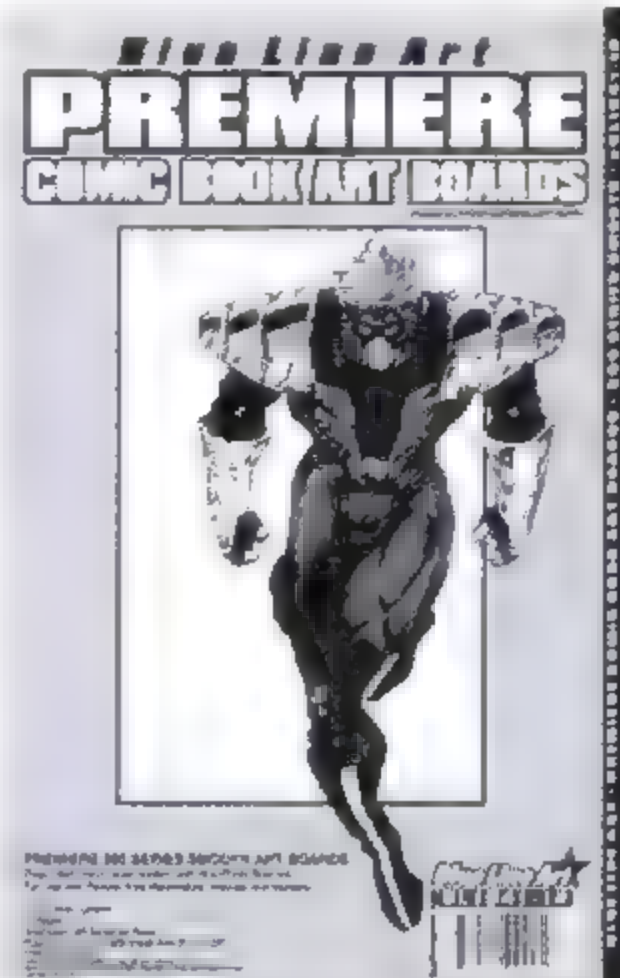


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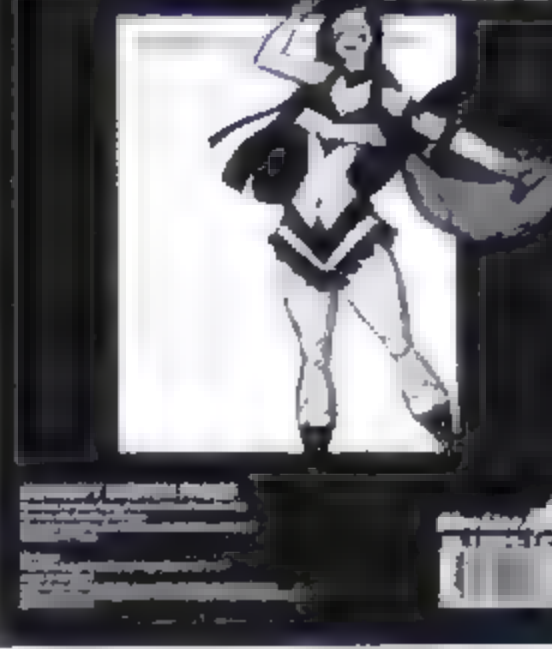
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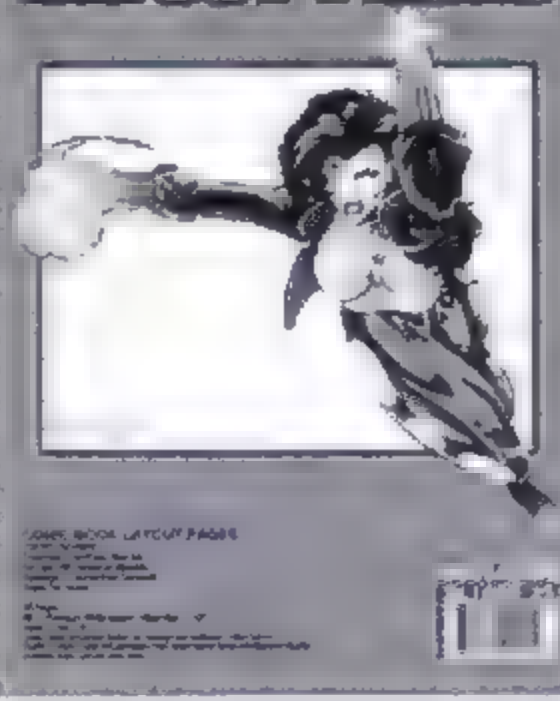
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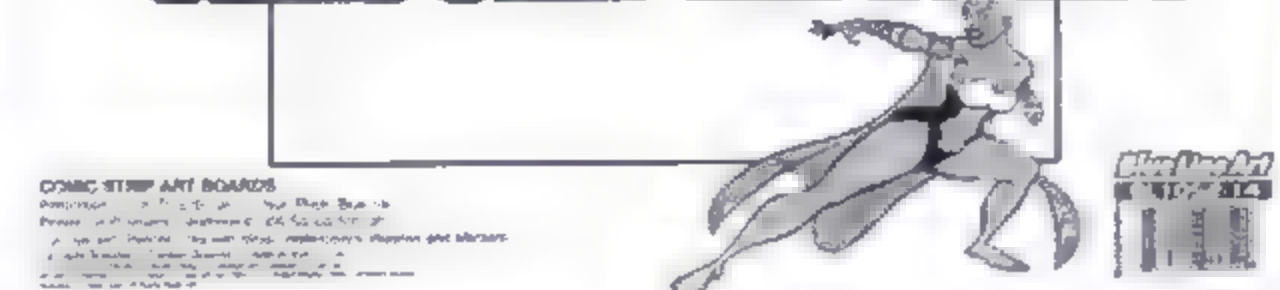
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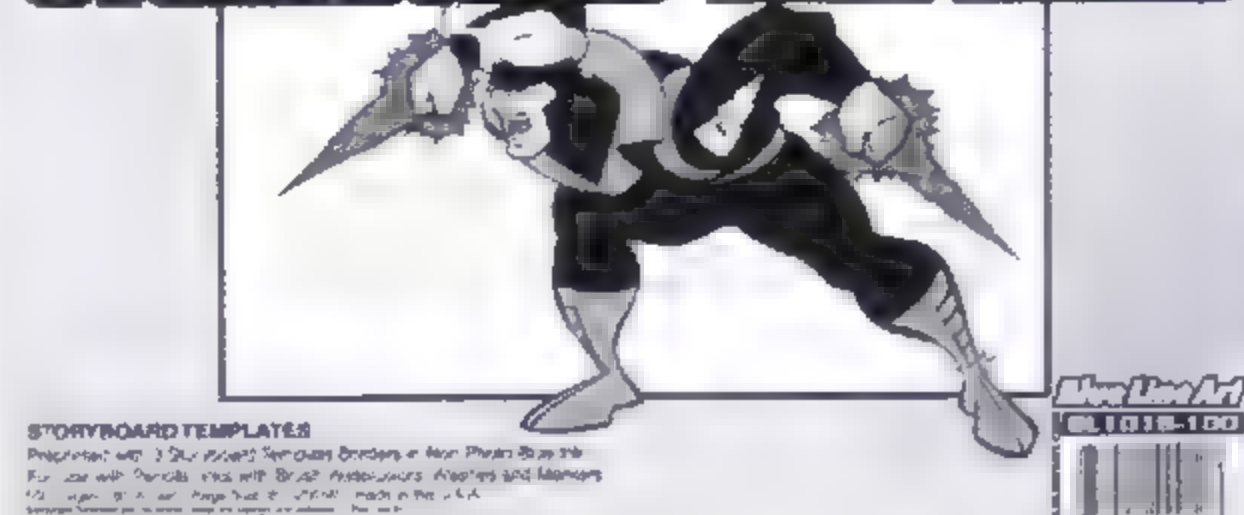
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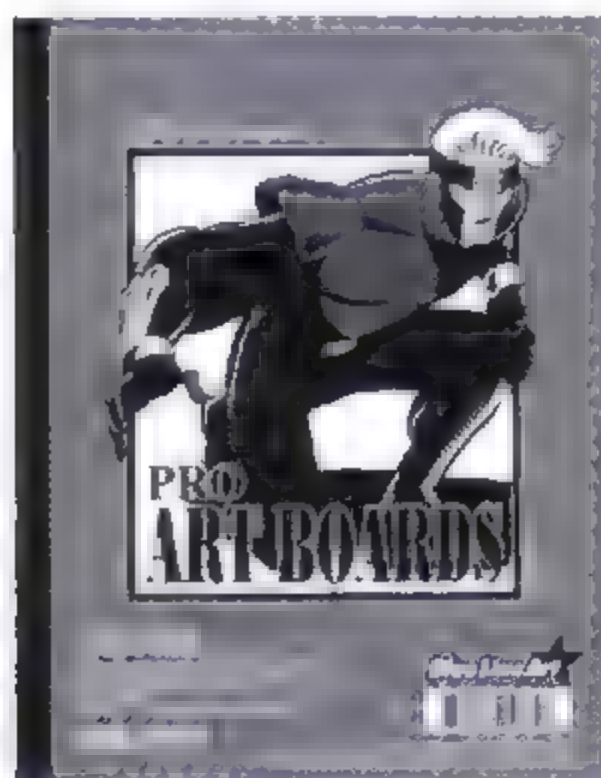


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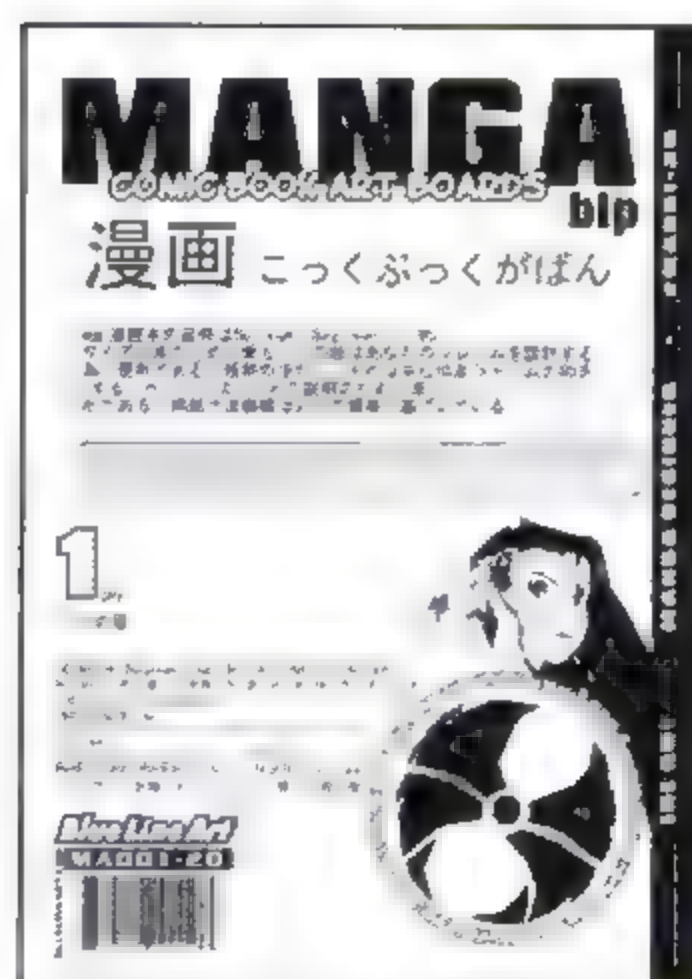
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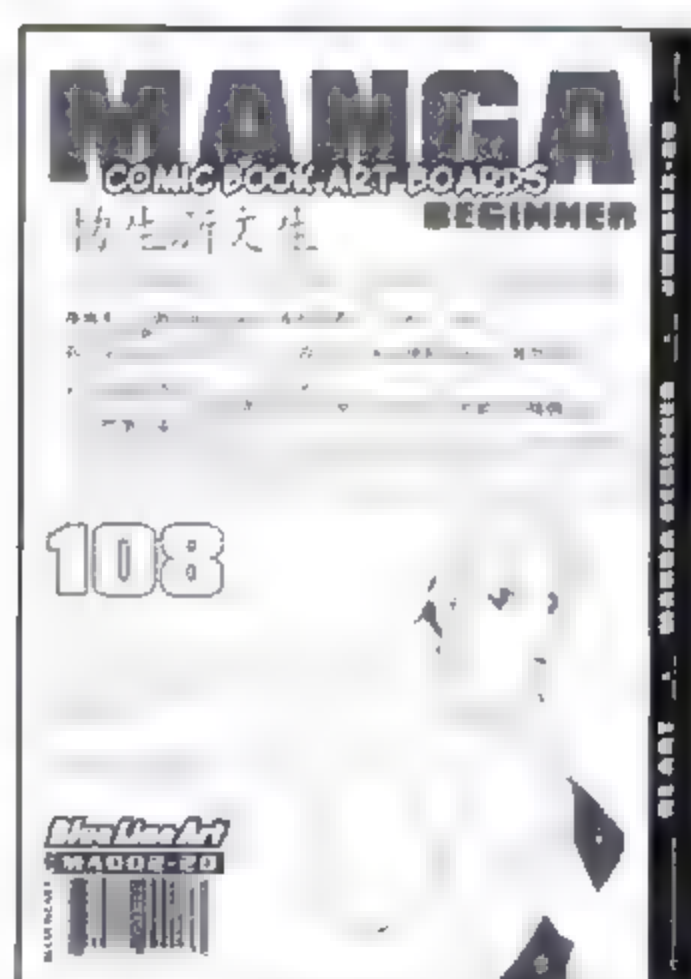


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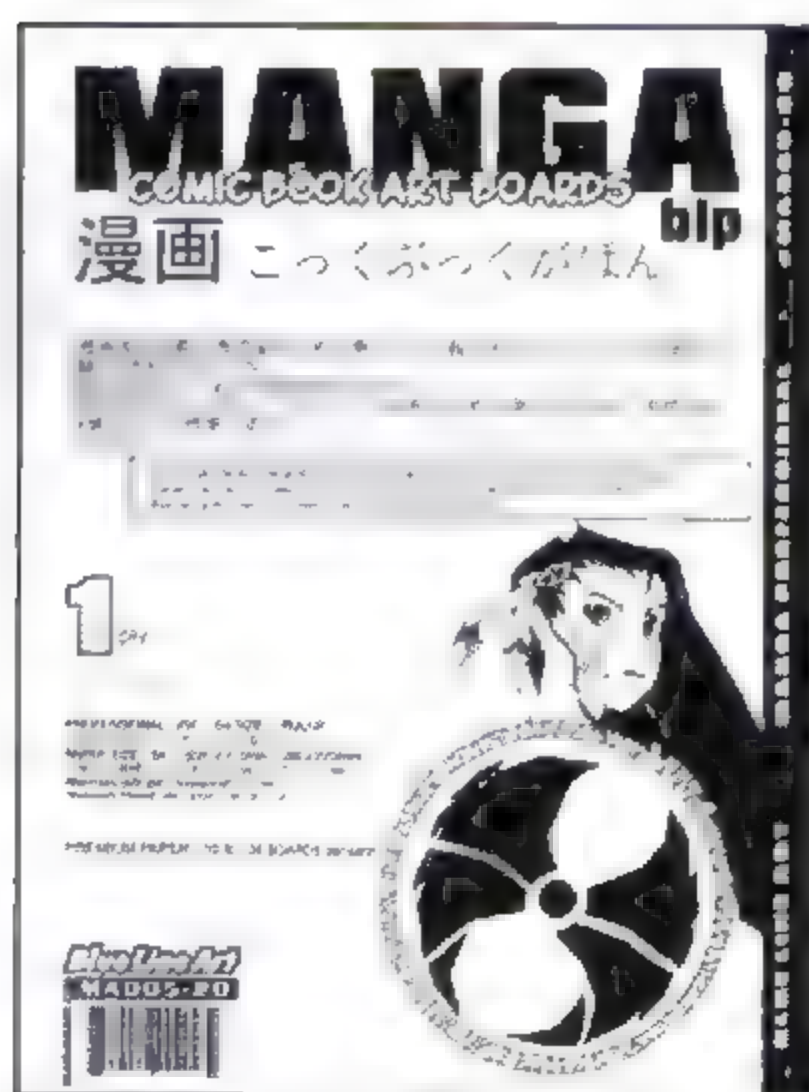
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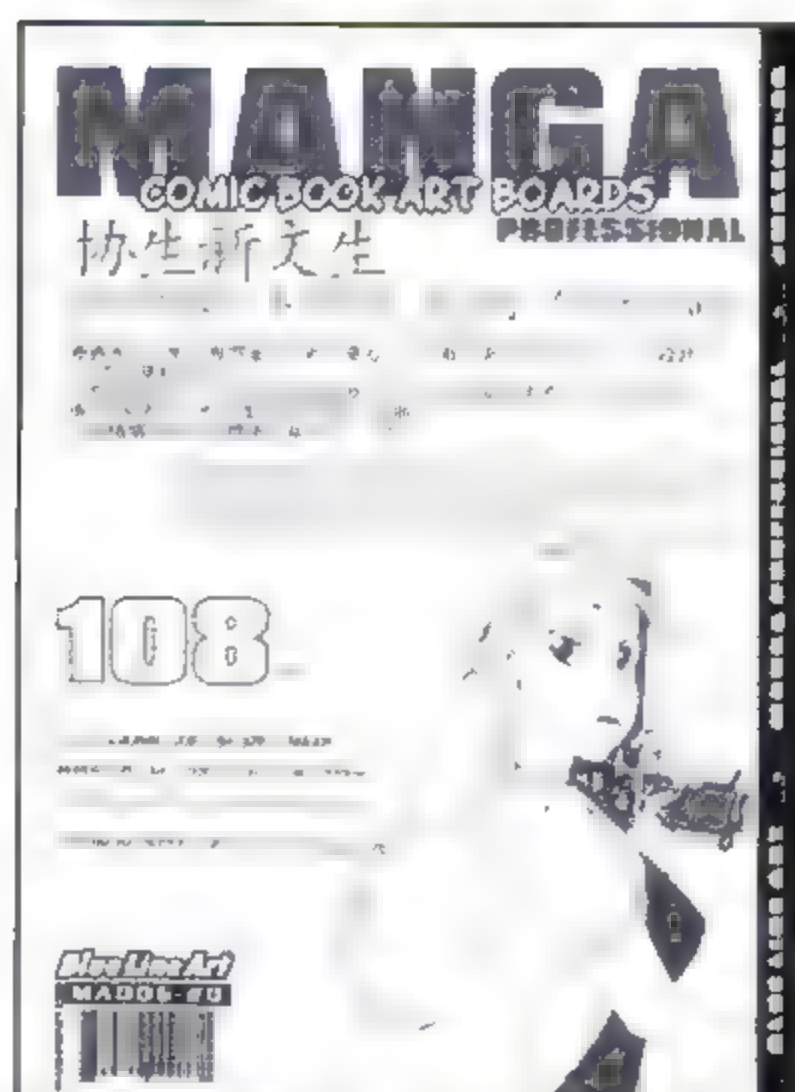
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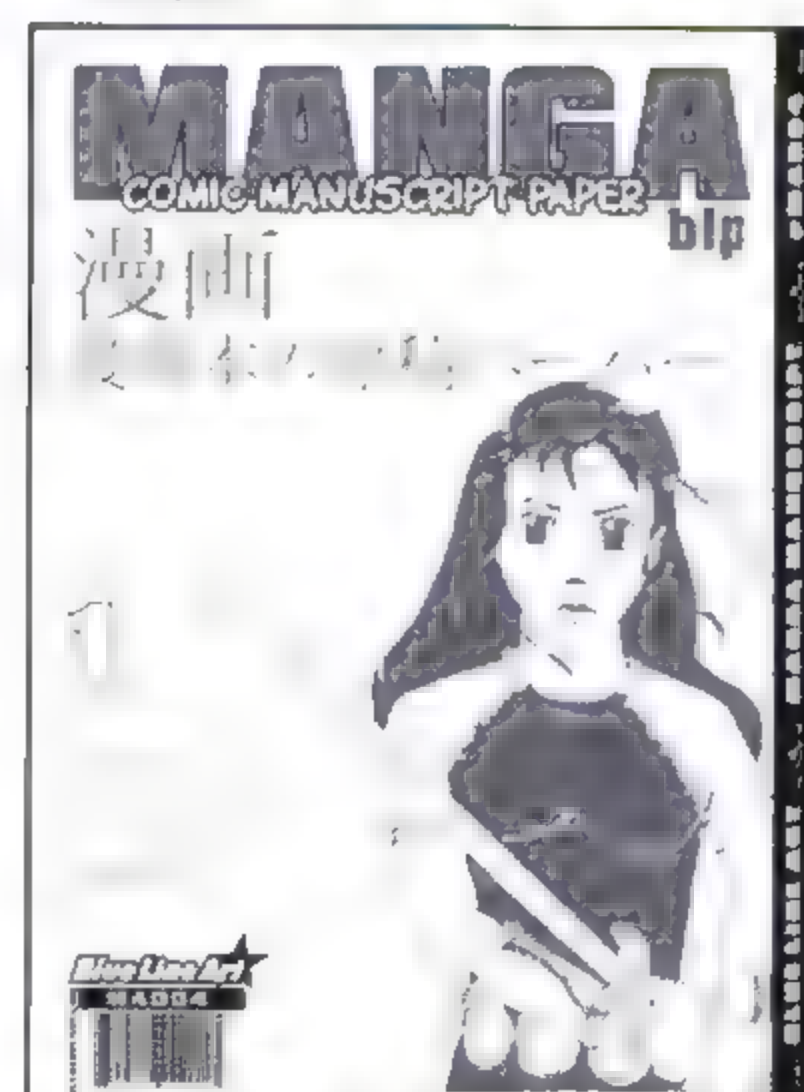
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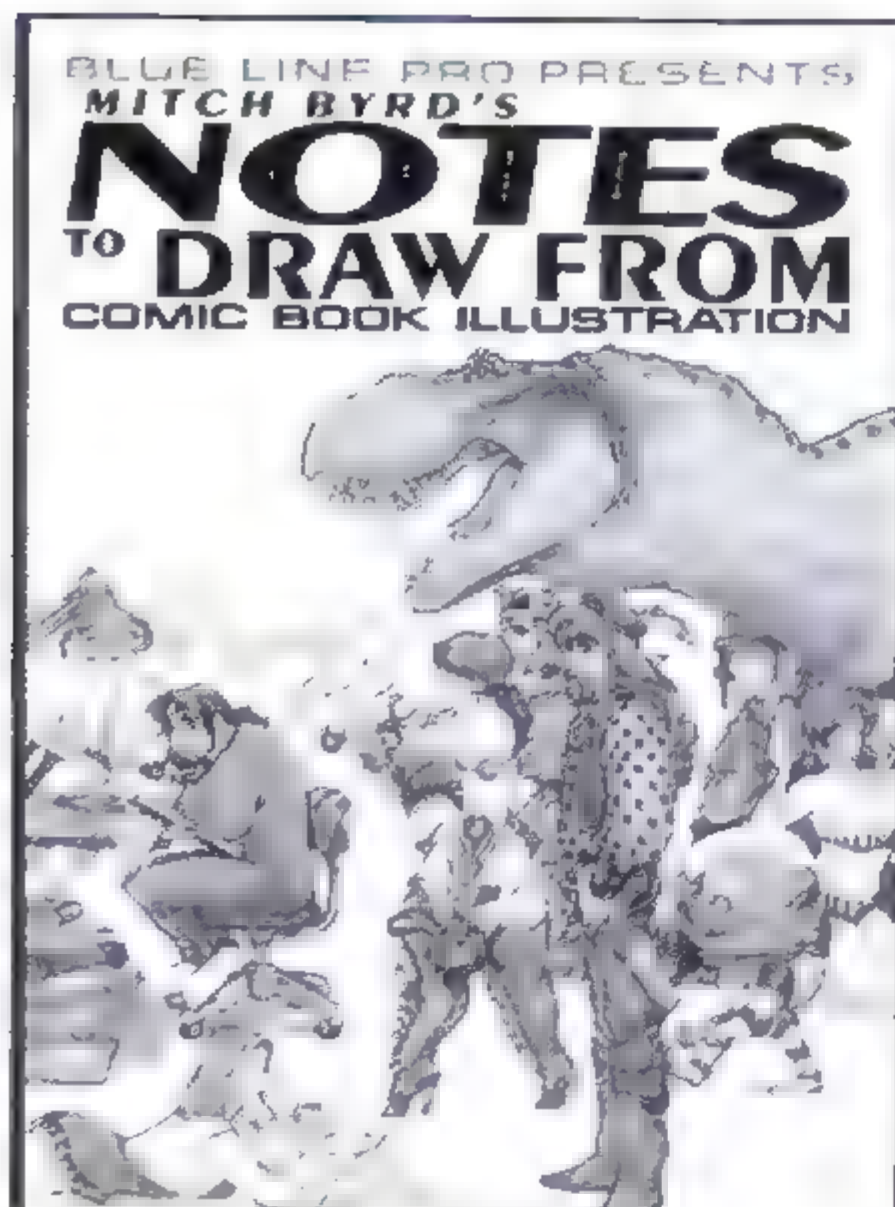


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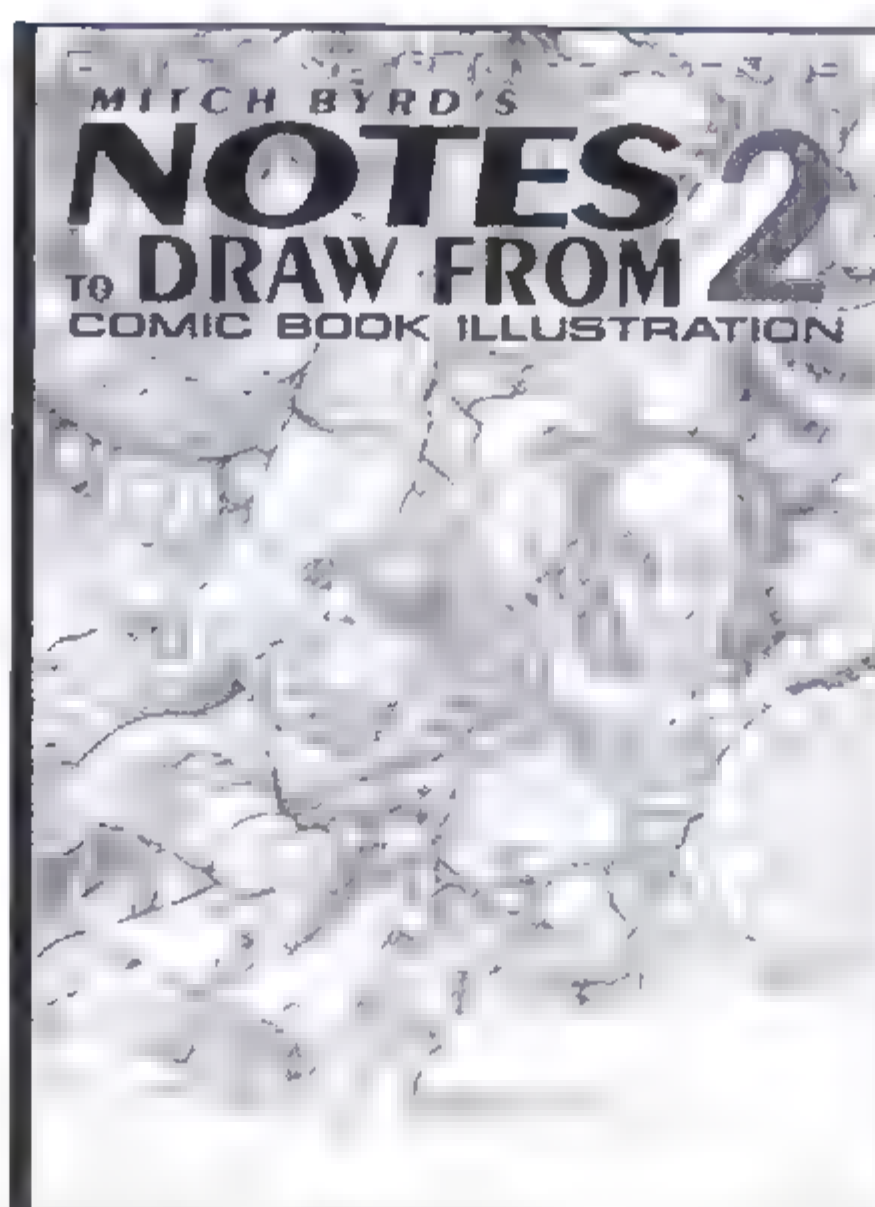
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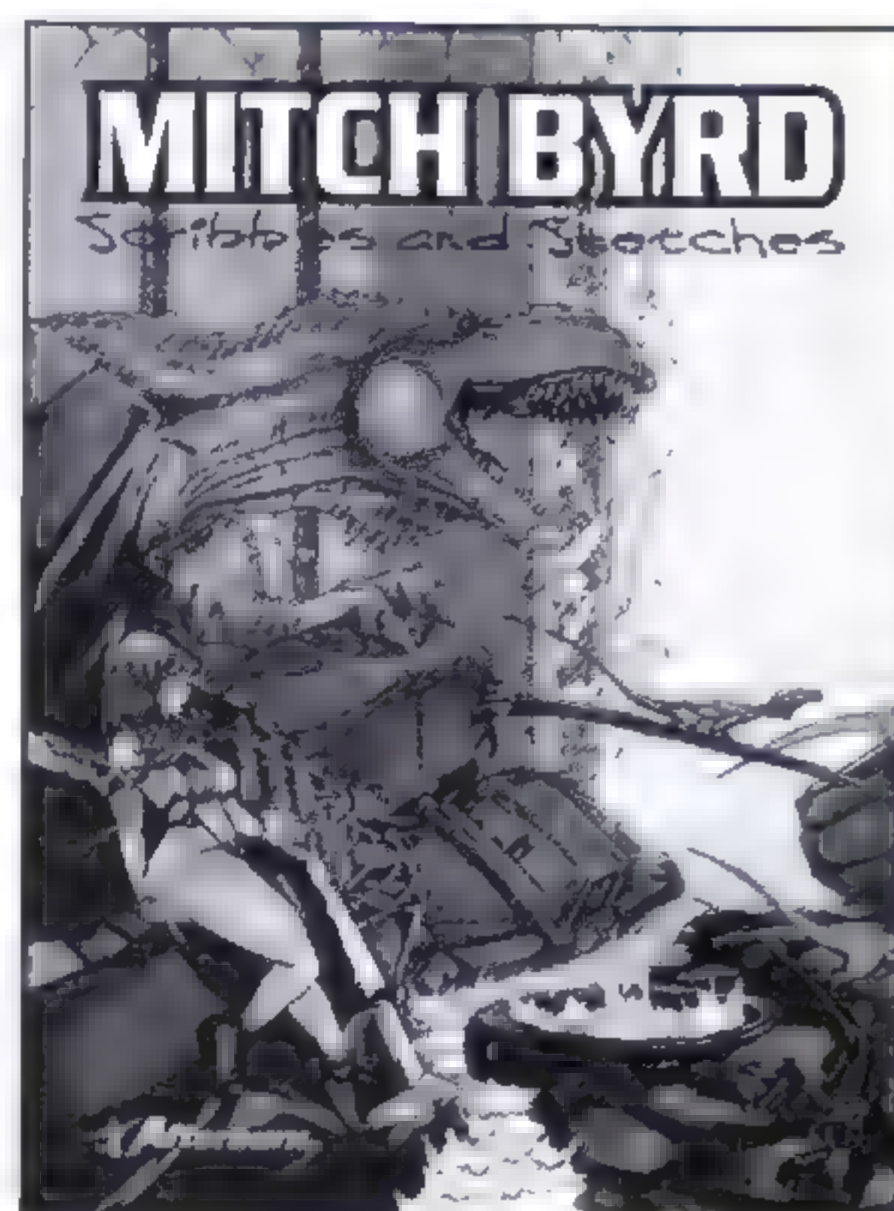
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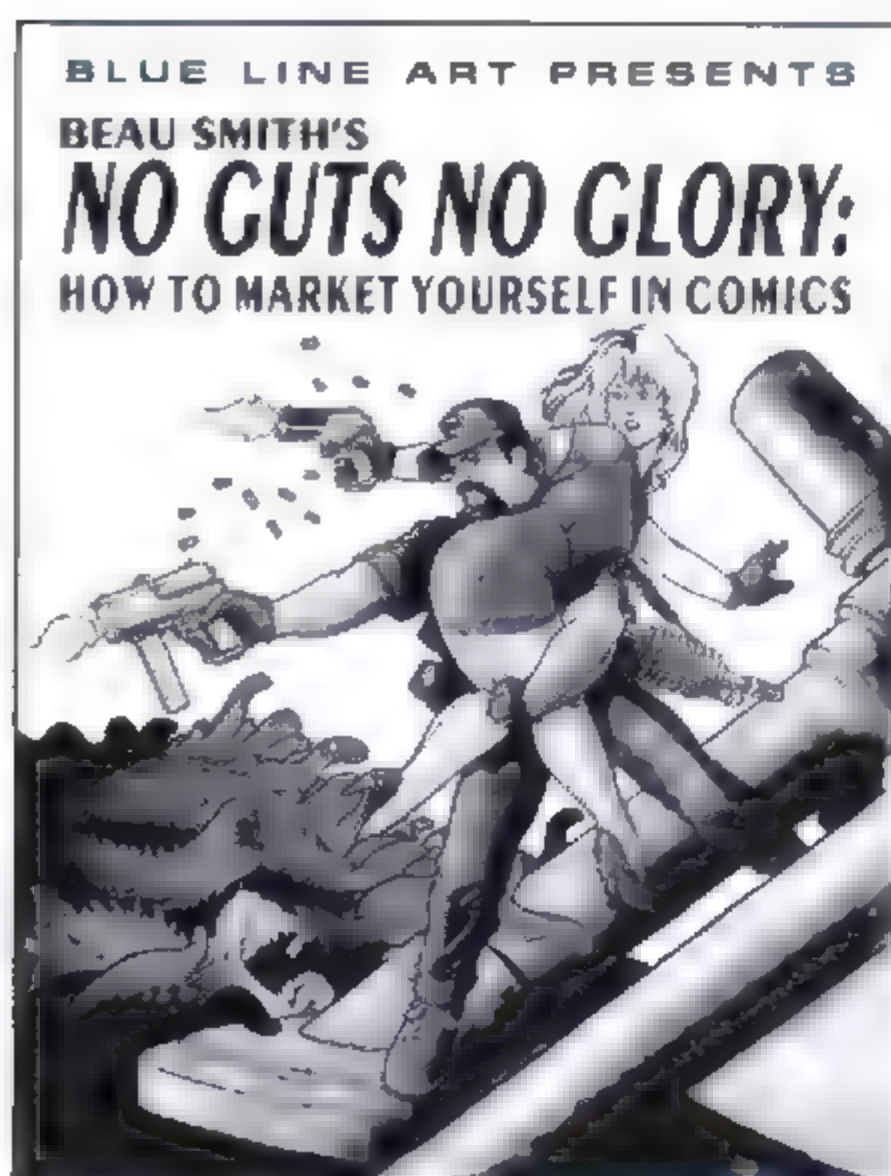
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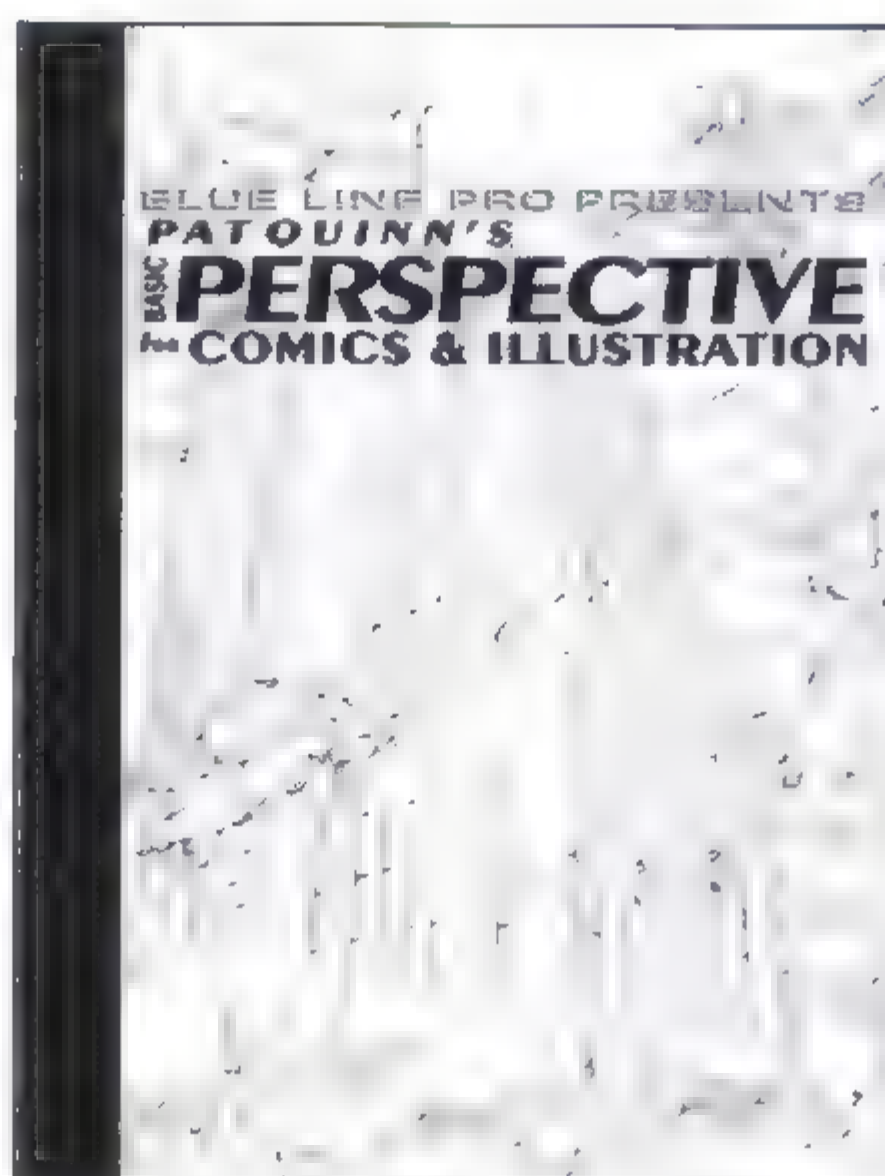


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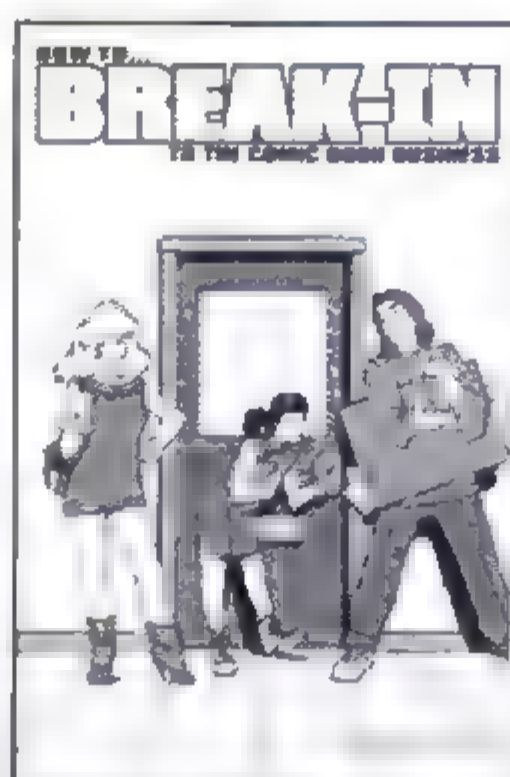
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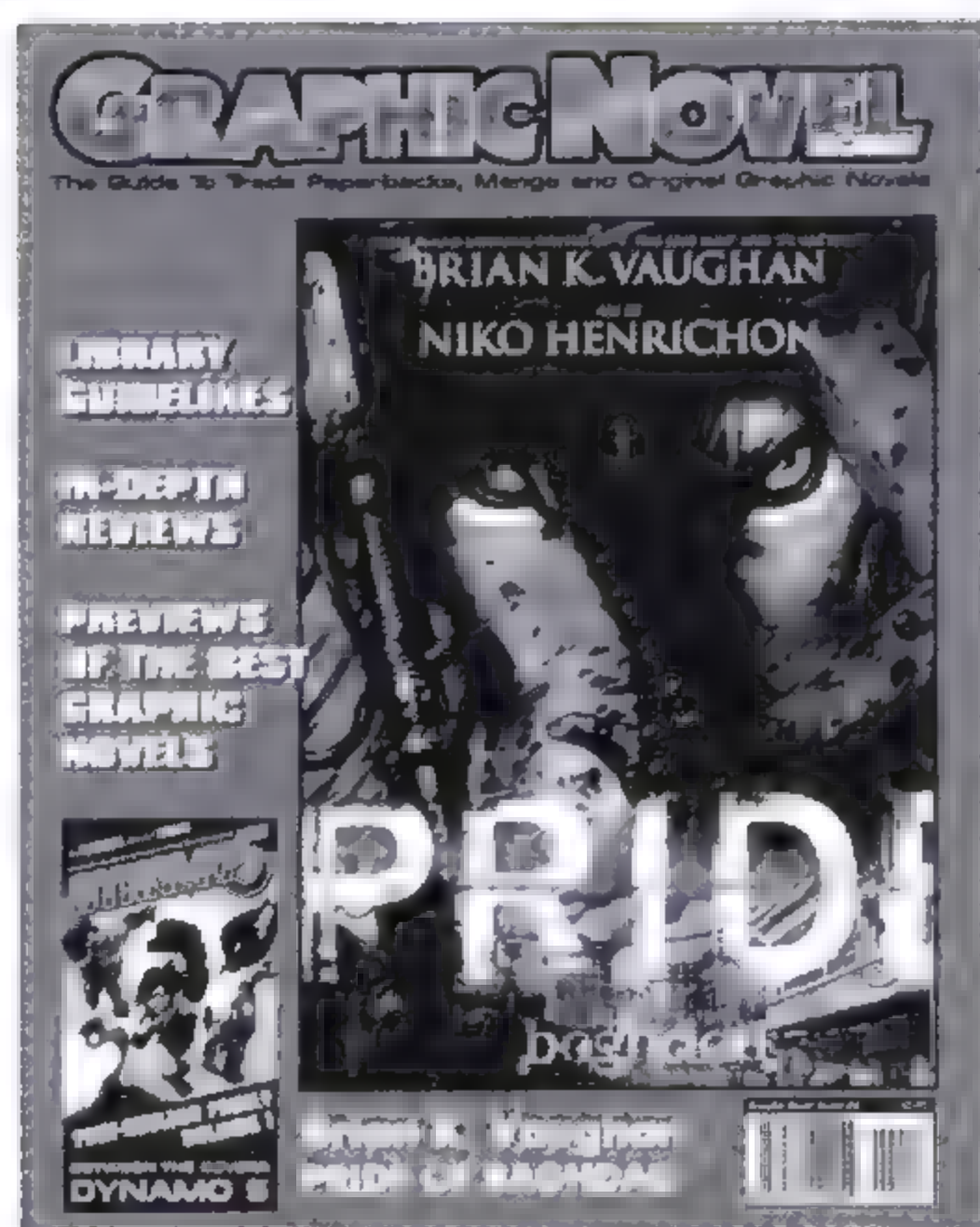
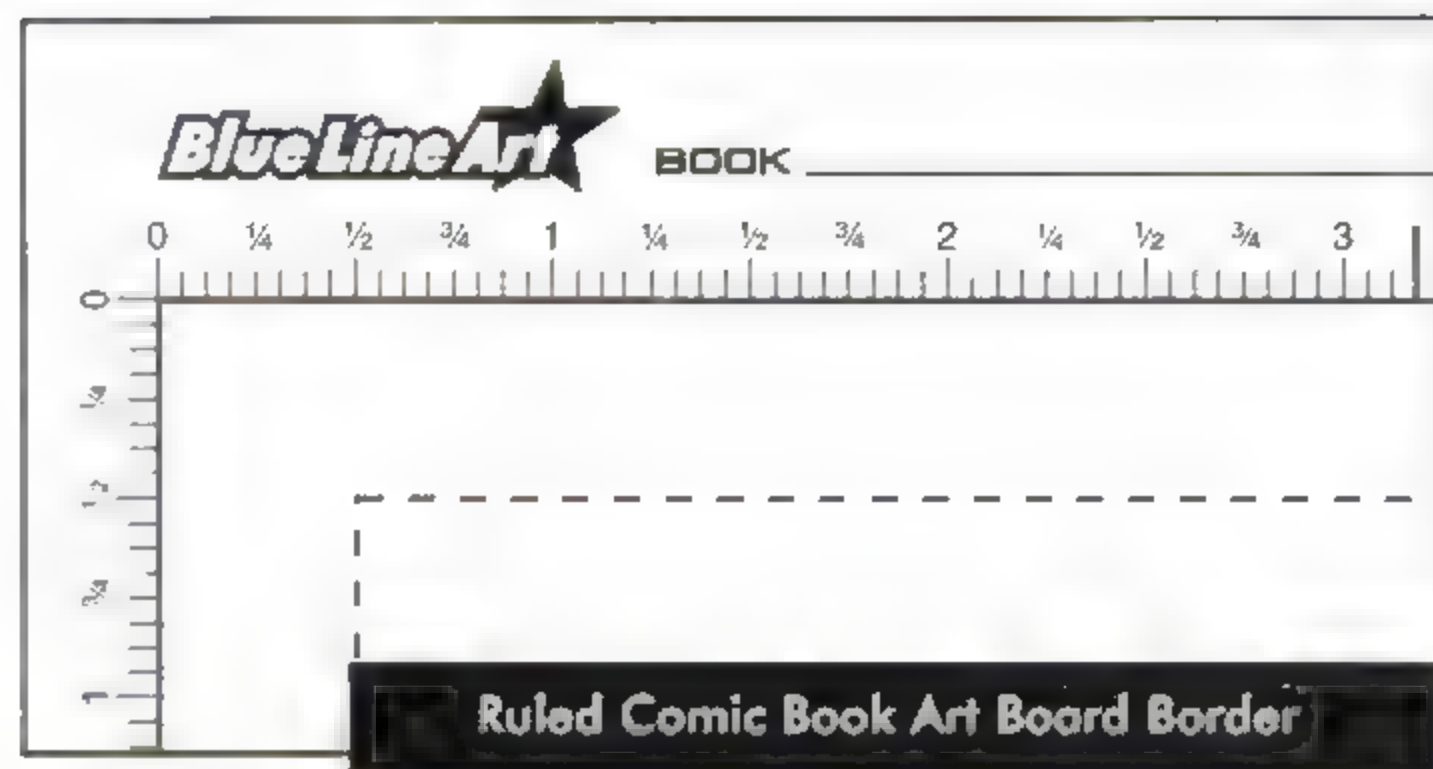
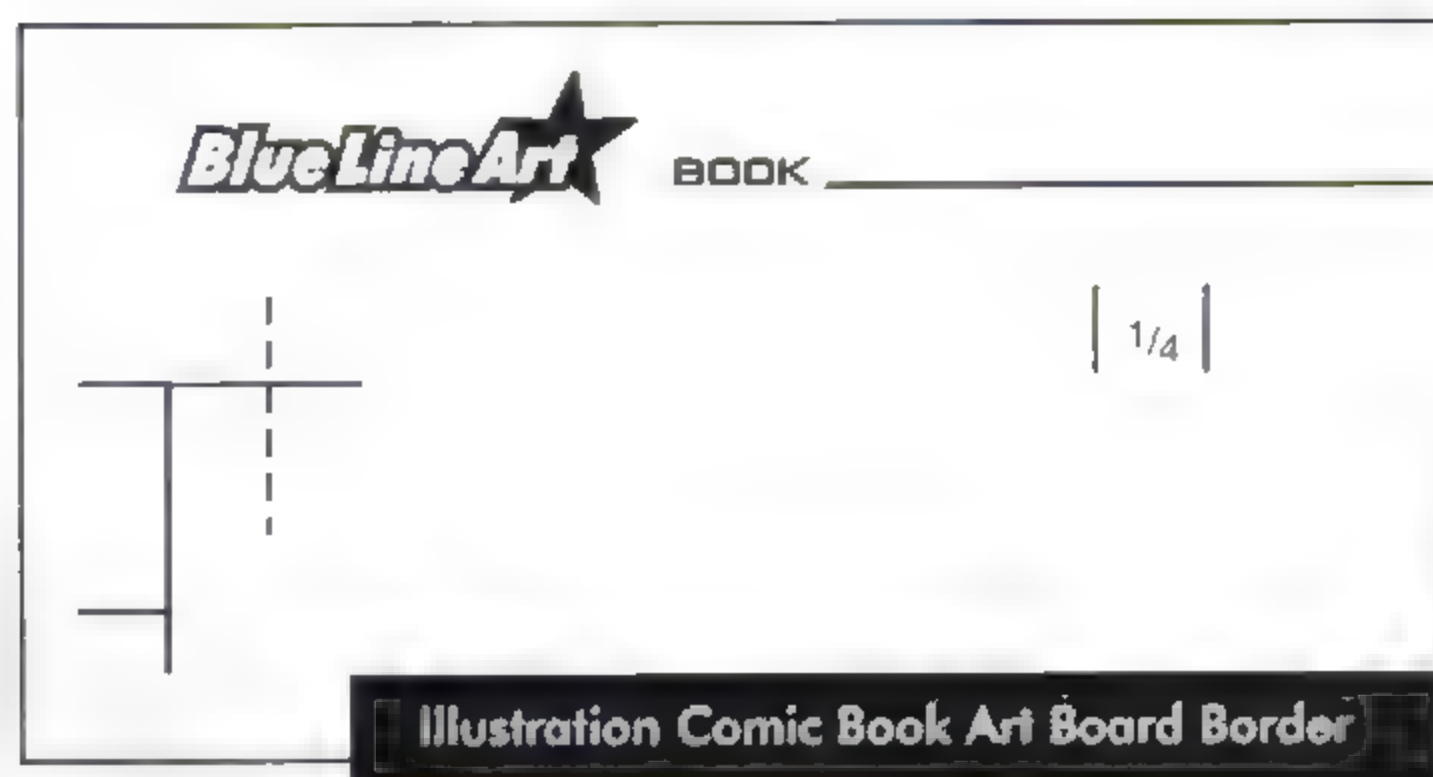
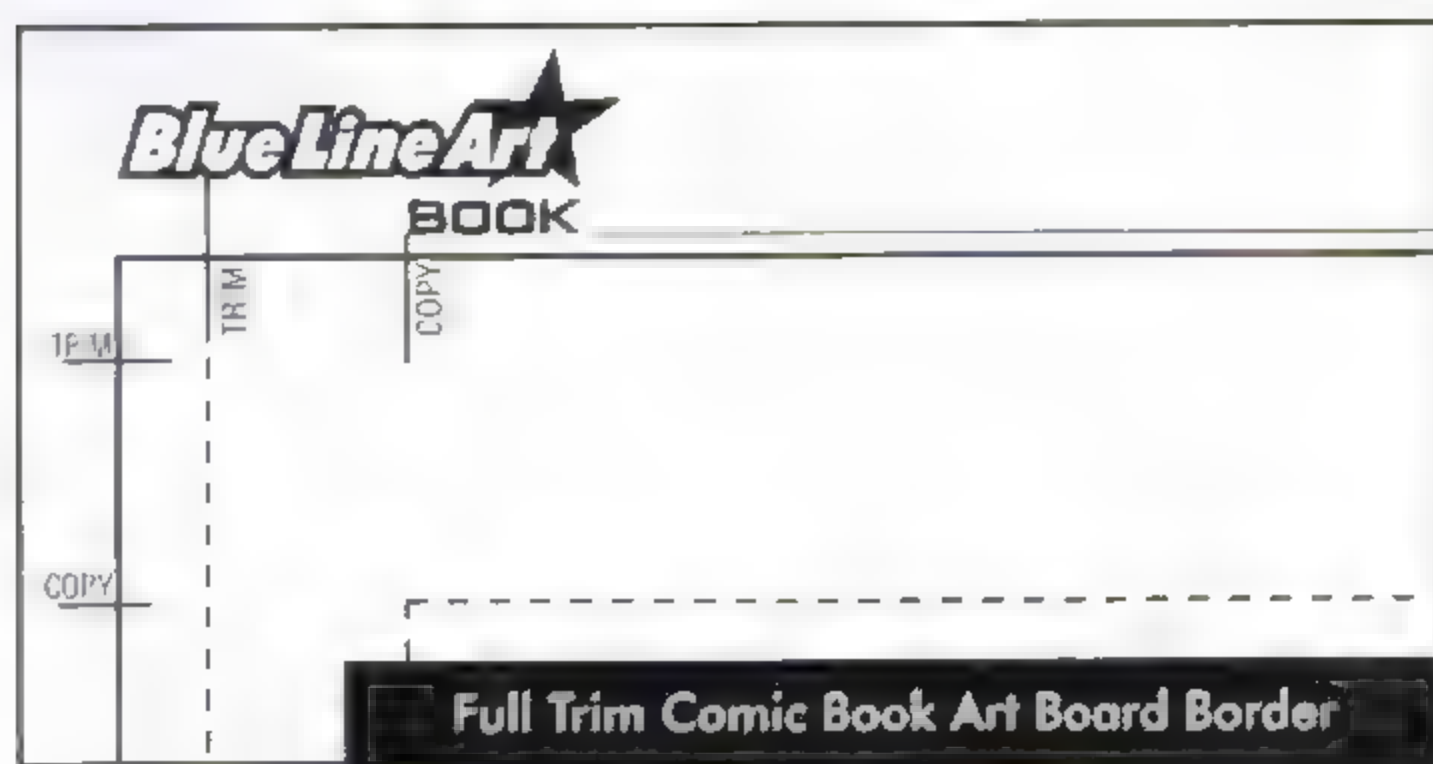
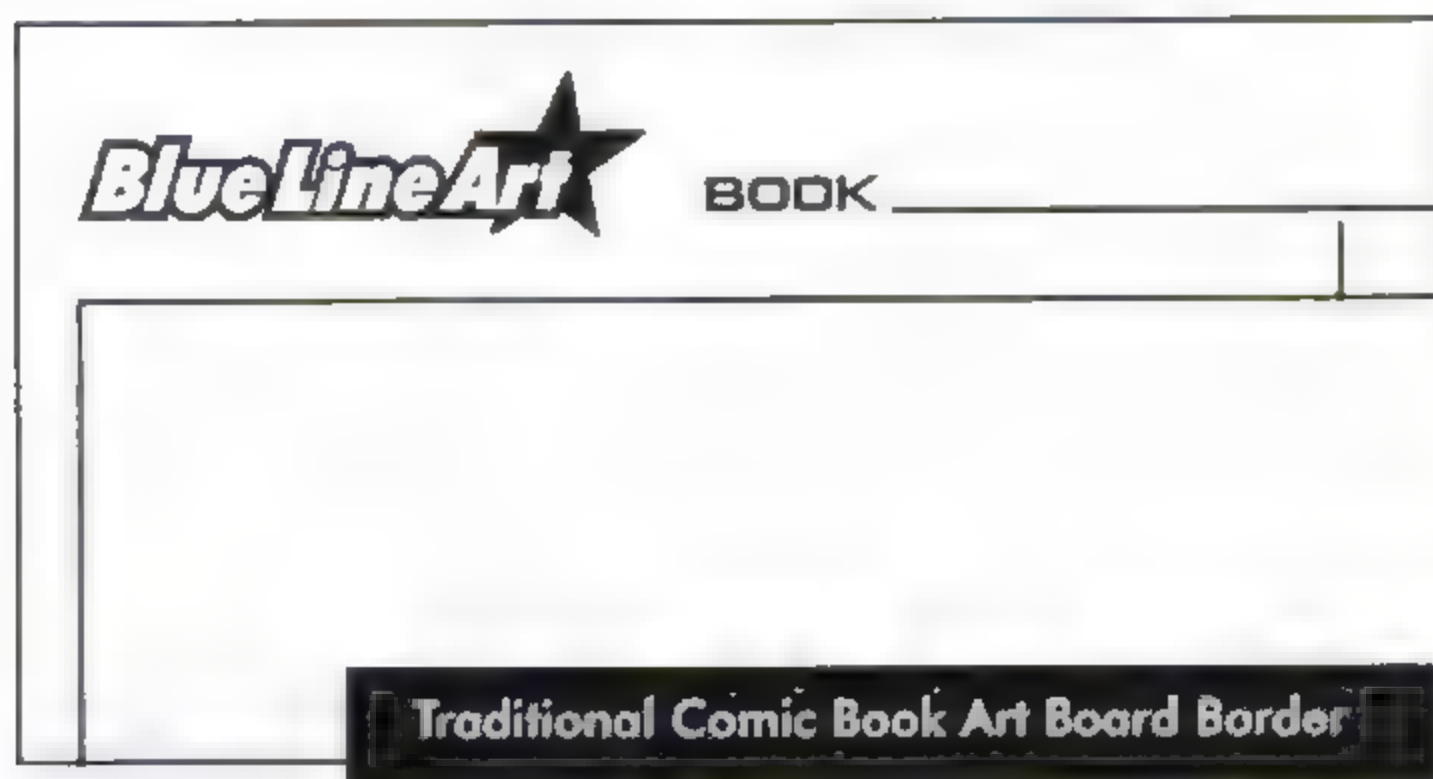
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SketchMagazine.net Forum Art Contest



SKETCH MAGAZINE FORUMS: ART CONTEST WINNERS

Willow Art Contest - Sequentials

Winner: Sami Kivela

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Stop by the Sketch Forums to participate in the next art contest.

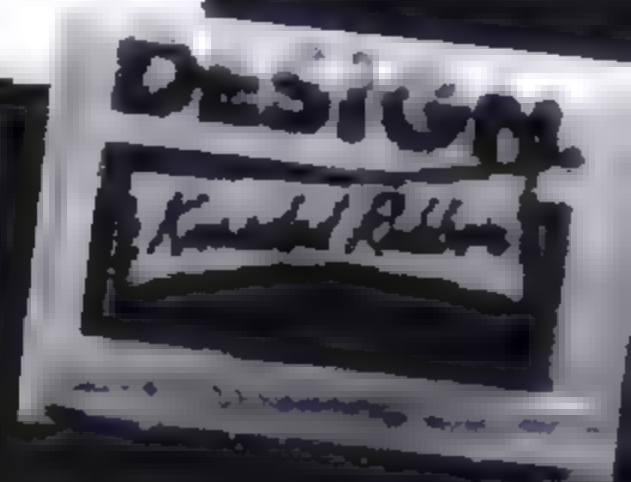
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“Allison Sohn”

Sketch Cards

by Bill Nichols

Sketch: What's on your drawing table right now, Allison?

Allison: Lord of the Rings cards (they are over a week late!) and Indiana Jones

Sketch: What's coming up for you?

Allison: Something exciting that my editor has asked me not to talk about!

Sketch: Yet, right? Okay, so when you're making those “pretty pictures” of yours, what medium do you prefer to use?

Allison: Right now I am in love with Copic Markers. I seem to be able to achieve a finish with them that I cannot get with any other mediums...

Sketch: Can you tell our readers something of your artistic background?

Allison: Well, I've been drawing as long as I can recall. I went to school for Illustration shortly after high school; I did that for one year before the cost forced me to pull out. I was then sucked into a retail existence (though an art retail one, which was really interesting) for almost 10 years after that. I finally went back to college for a degree in graphic



design about 8 years ago. But all the time that was going on, I kept busy drawing.

Sketch: *What kinds of things inspire you?*

Allison: Amazing artwork inspires me, plain and simple. Whether it's comic books or an exhibit of Waterhouse paintings at the Met. I love looking to see what other artists are doing, or have done, and it always makes me want to come home and draw more; draw better.

Sketch: *What's your day like?*

Allison: Heh; now isn't really a great time for that question, as my day is completely topsy-turvy. We

adopted 2 puppies shortly before Christmas, and my day usually involves trying to tire them out, and in the brief moments in between, squeezing in as many sketch cards as I can. Before the dogs, I could do 8 - 16 cards a day. Now, I'm doing 2 - 6 a day.

Sketch: *What are some of the tools or equipment you use?*

Allison: I use a lead holder to draw with; and I use anything from a 2b lead to a 6b. A friend of mine pointed out that depending on the humidity, temperature, and surface you draw on, your leads react differently. So I keep an assortment available to pick from.

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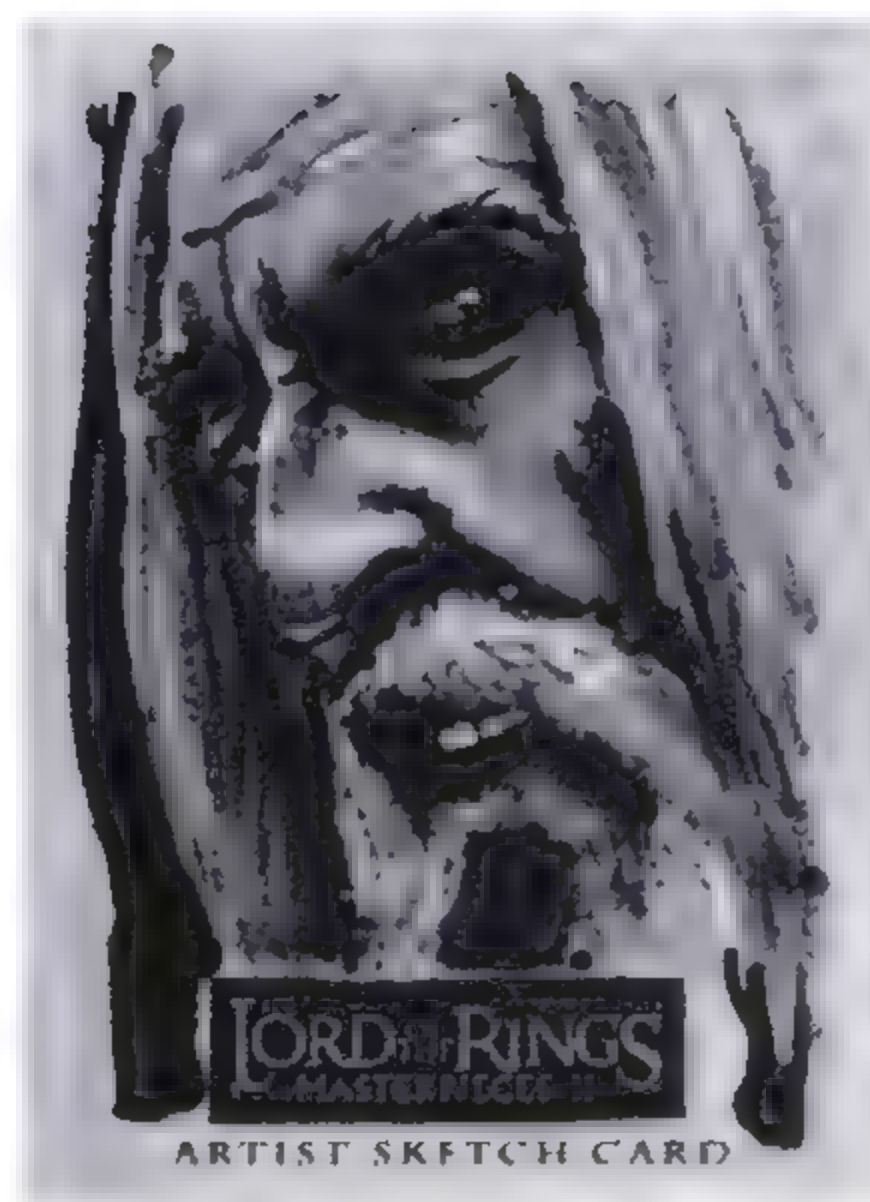
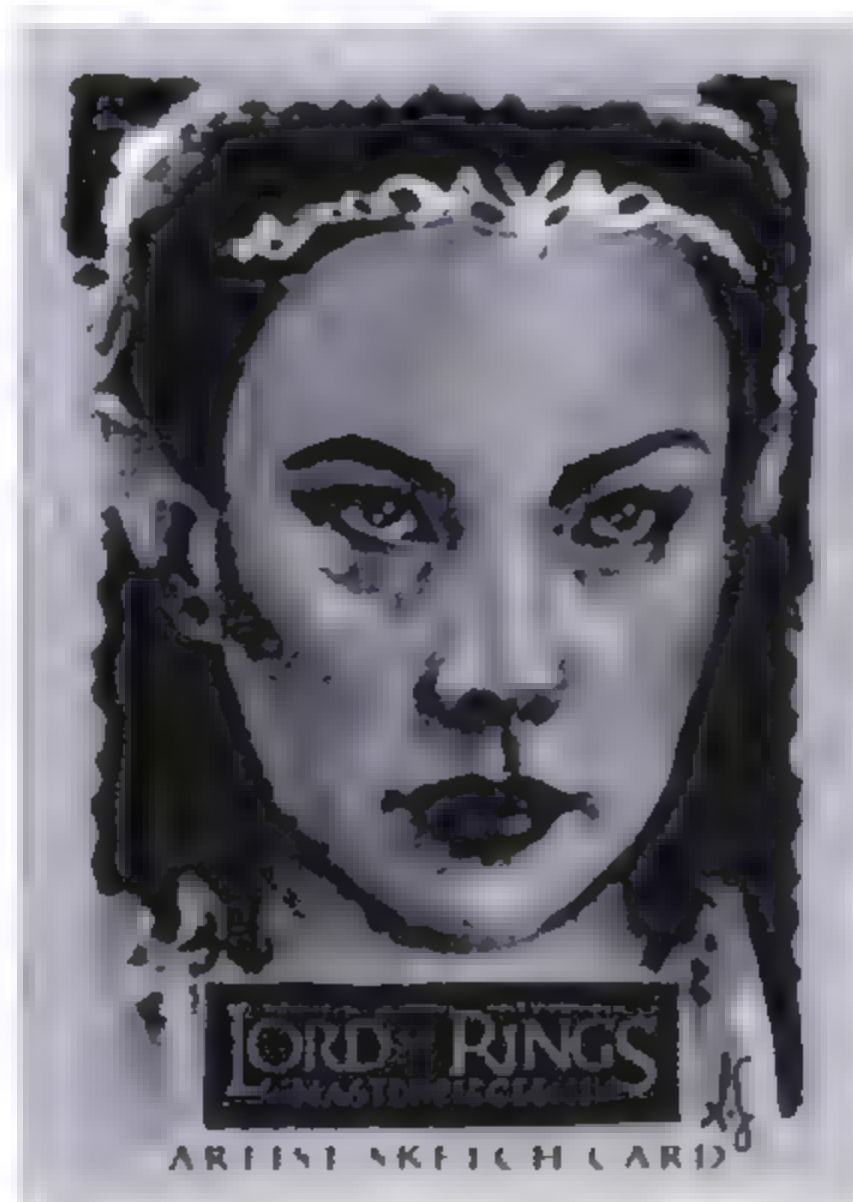
YOU NEED
TO START
IN BLACK
AND WHITE

INKS
AND
WHITE
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interview



I color using a variety of mediums: markers, pastels, color pencils and a touch of paint. I love Copic markers to death right now. I feel so empowered by them, and they play so nicely with all my other tools.

Sketch: Is there anything you wish you doing instead?

Allison: Instead of drawing? Not a thing in the world. I feel like the luckiest girl alive: I get to draw for

Star Wars (my favorite film since I saw it in 1977) for *Lord of the Rings* (my favorite books going on 25 years) and assorted comic companies. AND I have new puppies. Someone pinch me. I think I must be dreaming.

Sketch: Trust us, Allison: It's real. Thanks!

Sketch

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Breaking In From the Sticks

by Roland Mann

Breaking into comics is a tough task for any creator, regardless of their specialty. Writers, pencilers, inkers, letterers, colorists all have a difficult time in getting both the time and the attention of editors. Creators in rural areas seem to have a doubly difficult time. Seems cows and chickens don't show the same appreciation for comic books that human beings do. Go figure.

To a certain extent, the thoughts presented here can also be applied to anyone *not* living in New York City. Traditionally, you pretty much had to live in the New York City area so that you could visit the offices of Marvel or DC.

Not so much today, thanks to the advent of technology. Thanks to, the widening of the industry through various other publishers, Marvel and DC, while still the biggest boys on the block, are not the only paying options. And, "pay" is really what we're all looking for when we talk about "breaking in." Anyone can print their own comic, but getting paid to do it is a different matter.

Still, living in close proximity to the offices in New York doesn't hurt. So what's a creator living in rural Mississippi (as I was when I "broke in") or Idaho or Nebraska to do?

Name recognition, I believe, is the first key for a creator to get his work noticed.

The line the big guys will give you is to send your samples to the submission editor. Ever notice how the submission editors rarely have a name? The truth of the matter is that very few creators are ever hired through the submissions pile. What happens behind the scenes is that generally someone has to open all the "submissions editor" mail. When they do so, they have a stack rejection letters just waiting to be returned to you.

That's not to say that no one is ever hired through this process. Occasionally a creator's work will

catch the eye of the submission editor. At that point, the submission editor can do one of two things: 1) take the samples and show it around to the various editors or 2) send something back to the creator asking for more samples.

When this second thing happens, the submission editor might not feel like the work is quite "there" to show around to the editors. So, he'll ask for more samples. If this happens to you, respond as quickly as possible. Turnaround time is something he'll be watching for.

Also, too, writers almost never get hired this way. The person serving as submission editor is generally swamped with work and simply does not have time to "read" a submission. Art, on the other hand, is easy to glance over fairly quickly.

But, while the chances aren't good, sending something to the submissions editor every six months is not a bad idea, and is a good option if you live in Podunk, USA. You can send the same material out to the various submissions editors, and every six months will be both good for you and might possibly lead to having your name recognized more quickly.

Another long-distance option is to target individual editors and send them letters to the books they edit and also send in your samples. An aggressive creator might send something as often as every other week. Sending more than that could get annoying. Absolutely do not call unless the editor has asked you to do so. This will get you quickly on the editor's "bad" list.

Don't let too much time lapse between your mailings—after all, you want them to remember your name.

One of the very best ways to get your name known is to travel to the annual comic conventions and meet the people in the industry. Meet

them all. And remember, first impressions *do* count! Try to chit-chat with them, but be polite and respectful of their time. Smaller conventions are better than the larger ones (like the San Diego Comic Con) because there are simply fewer people there in competition with you for their time.

Rarely will an editor have time for you in San Diego—they're too busy meeting their regular freelancers. Don't let that stop you from trying, but keep that in mind. Search the Internet for listings of the smaller shows and travel to the ones you can. Don't go planning to have an all-night gaming session—your goal should be to meet and hang out with comic creators.

Lastly, absolutely do not ignore the small press. Yeah, so what if you don't make any money producing a four-issue mini-series? If it gets in print, you begin to build a body of work. Believe it or not, a printed and saddle-stitched copy of your artwork is far more impressive than photocopies from the Copy Cow. Remember again, it's all about getting your name out there.

And be productive. Don't show the same samples two years in a row. You laugh, but that happened to me while I was an editor with Malibu. I saw the same samples two years in a row. Guess what? My response was the same both years.

Find other creators who want to also produce a body of work—there are plenty of ways to meet them—and team up with them to produce something as regularly as you possibly can.

Be persistent. Be nice, but be persistent. Remember the old adage (and the very one I use with my kids today), practice makes perfect. So practice, practice, practice.

Sketch



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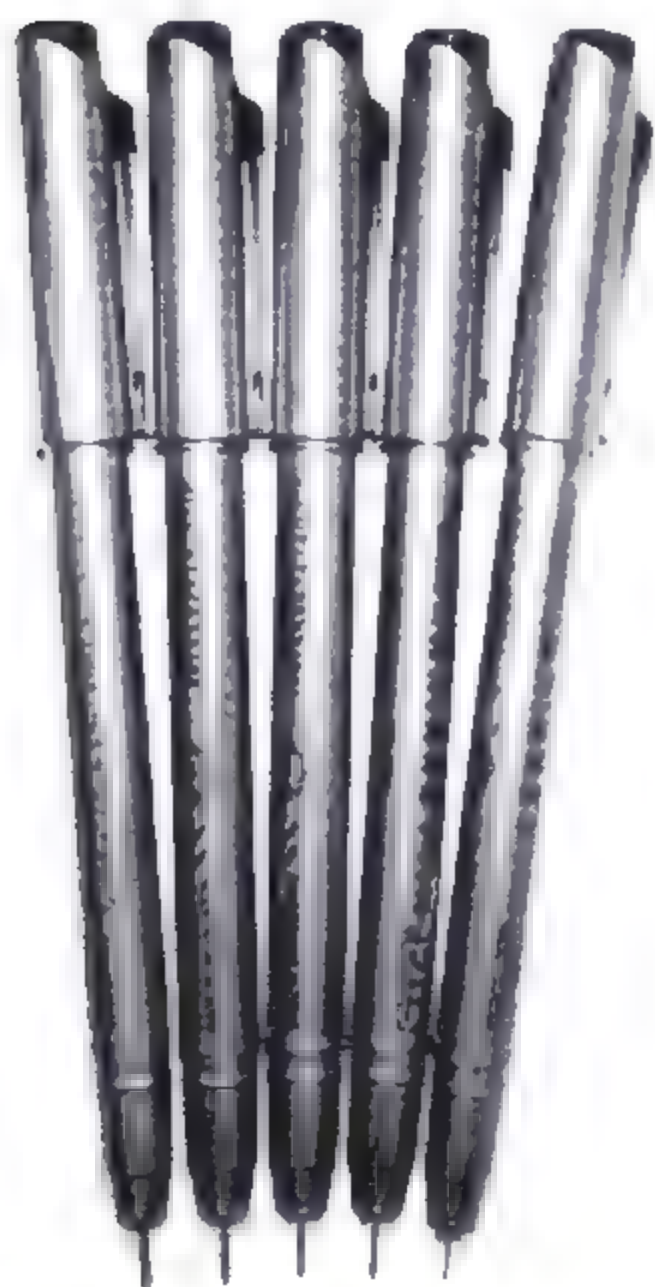
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ZIG Millennium Collection

by Kuretake

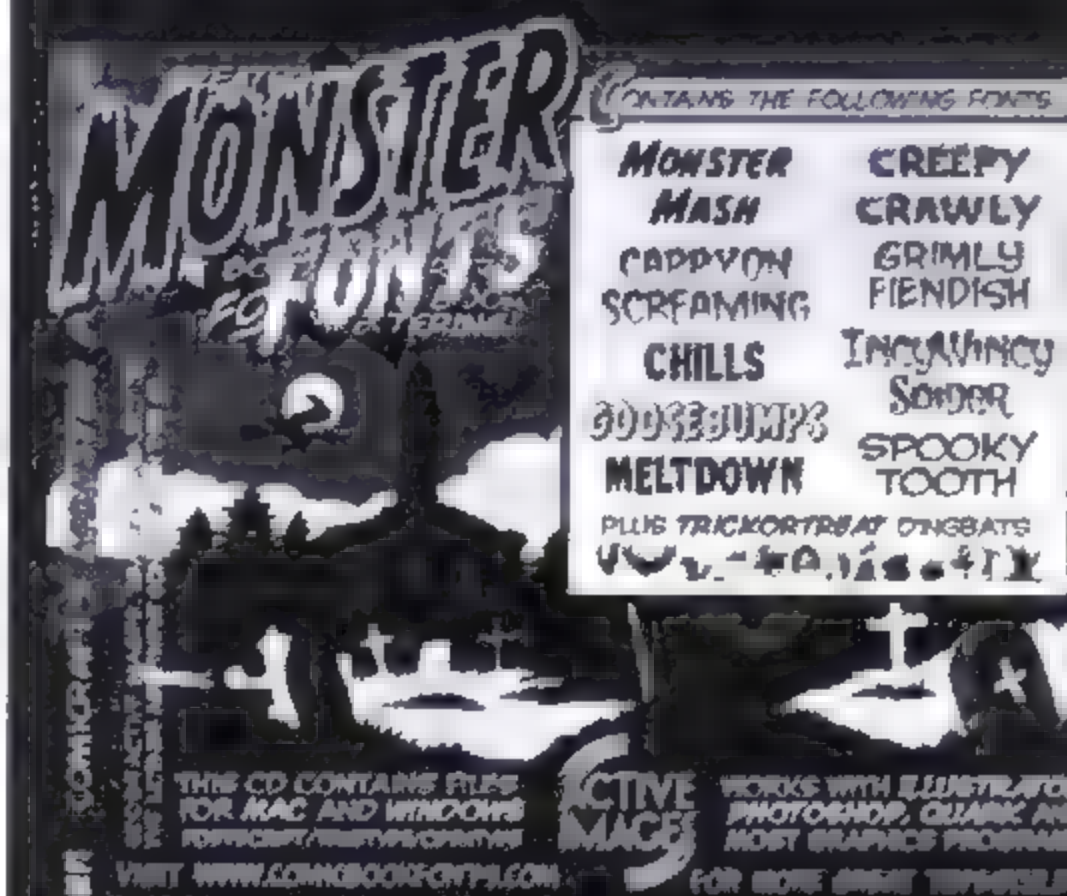
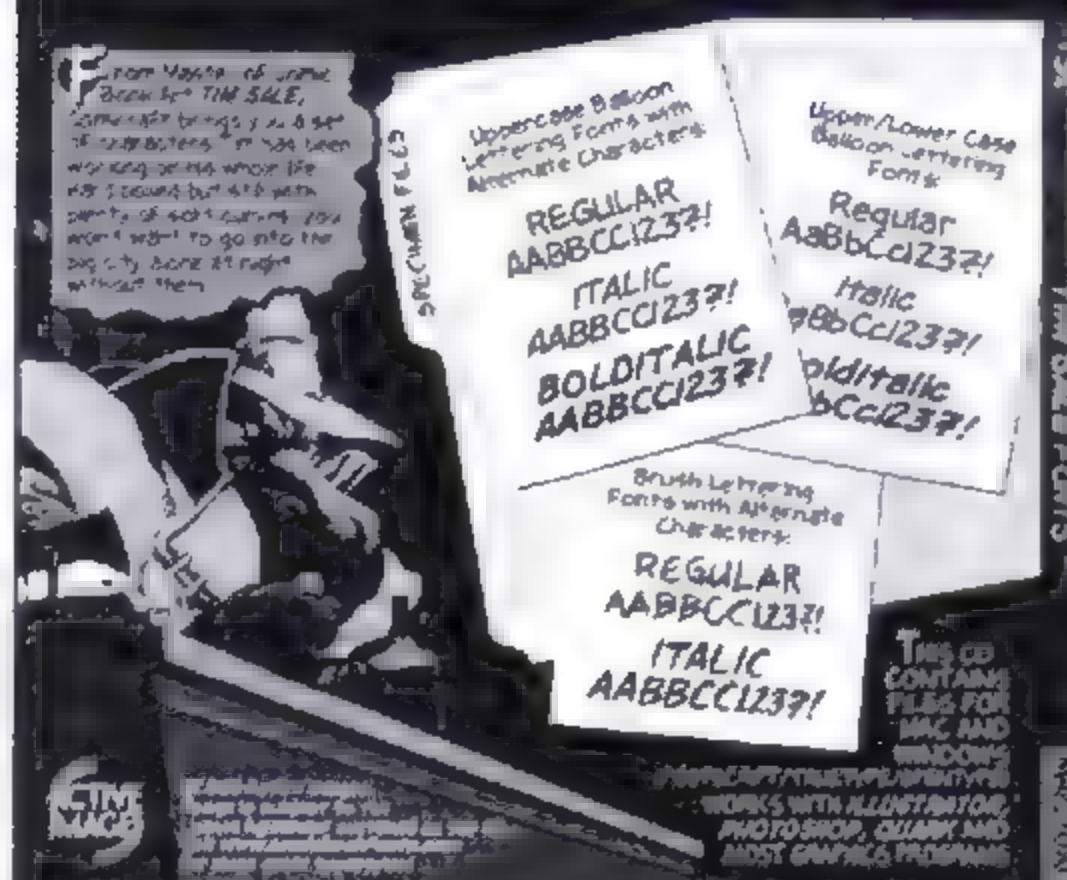
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Classroom Collaboration!

by Gary Barker

In this feature is the finished illo of **Ursula** that I penciled, loosely based on the classic Steranko cover from *The Hulk King-Size Special #1*. It will be inked for next issue by Bill Nichols, who created the character. You knew he was an inker, right?

But I was curious how others might interpret the character, if given the same character descriptions that Bill had given me and then I had a thought...

During the spring semester at Ringling, I taught two Illustration classes to first-year students. I'm always searching for assignments that give them as close to real-life experience as possible. With Bill's approval, I offered the students an opportunity to not only get a grade but possibly published in *Sketch Magazine*.

Without seeing what I had visualized, the students were to take Bill's written character descriptions and create a splash page in comic book format. They were to design Ursula and any of the other characters that they wished, as well as tell a story with their illustrations. After the assignment was finished, I sent Bill the ones I felt were among the strongest. He narrowed it down to six and these are his comments about each...



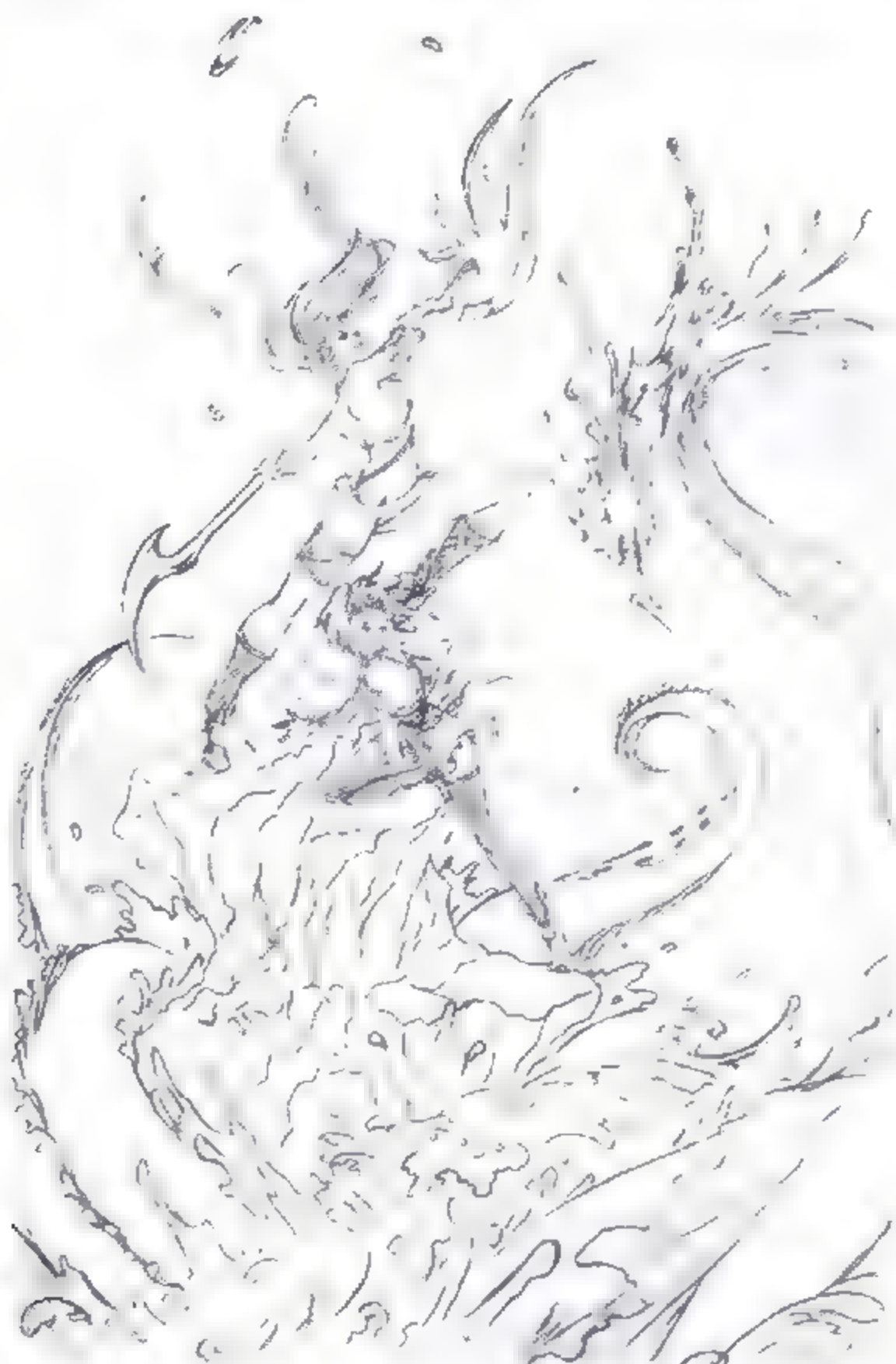
Mark Eaton for his overall pose and image...



Justin Thibault's humor amid the carnage...



Jason Long's stark and mysterious rendition...



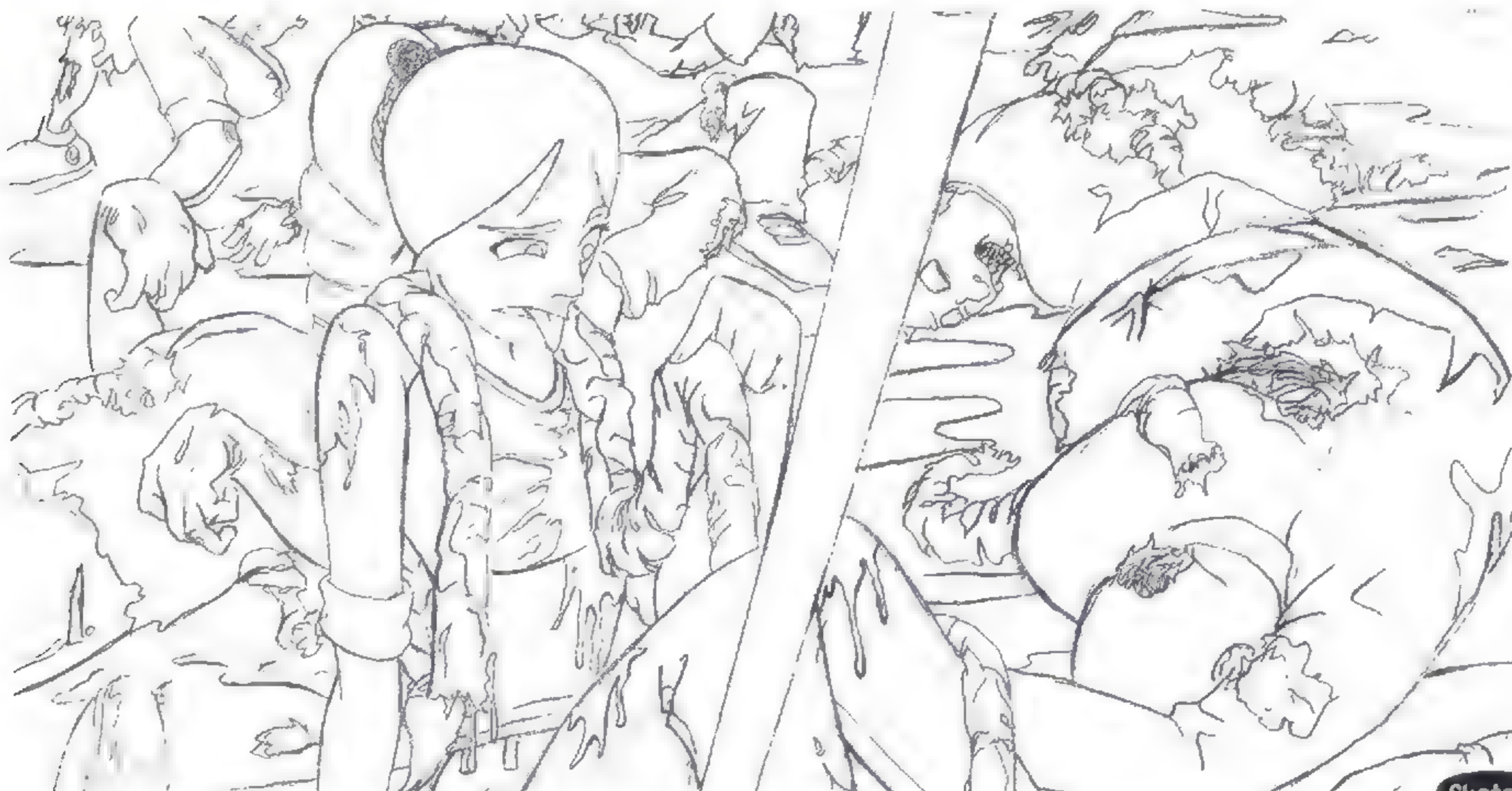
Charli Ho for the savage power in her illustration...



Caroline Boyk's athletic approach to the character...



Michelle Cruz for her depiction of the character Jewel...

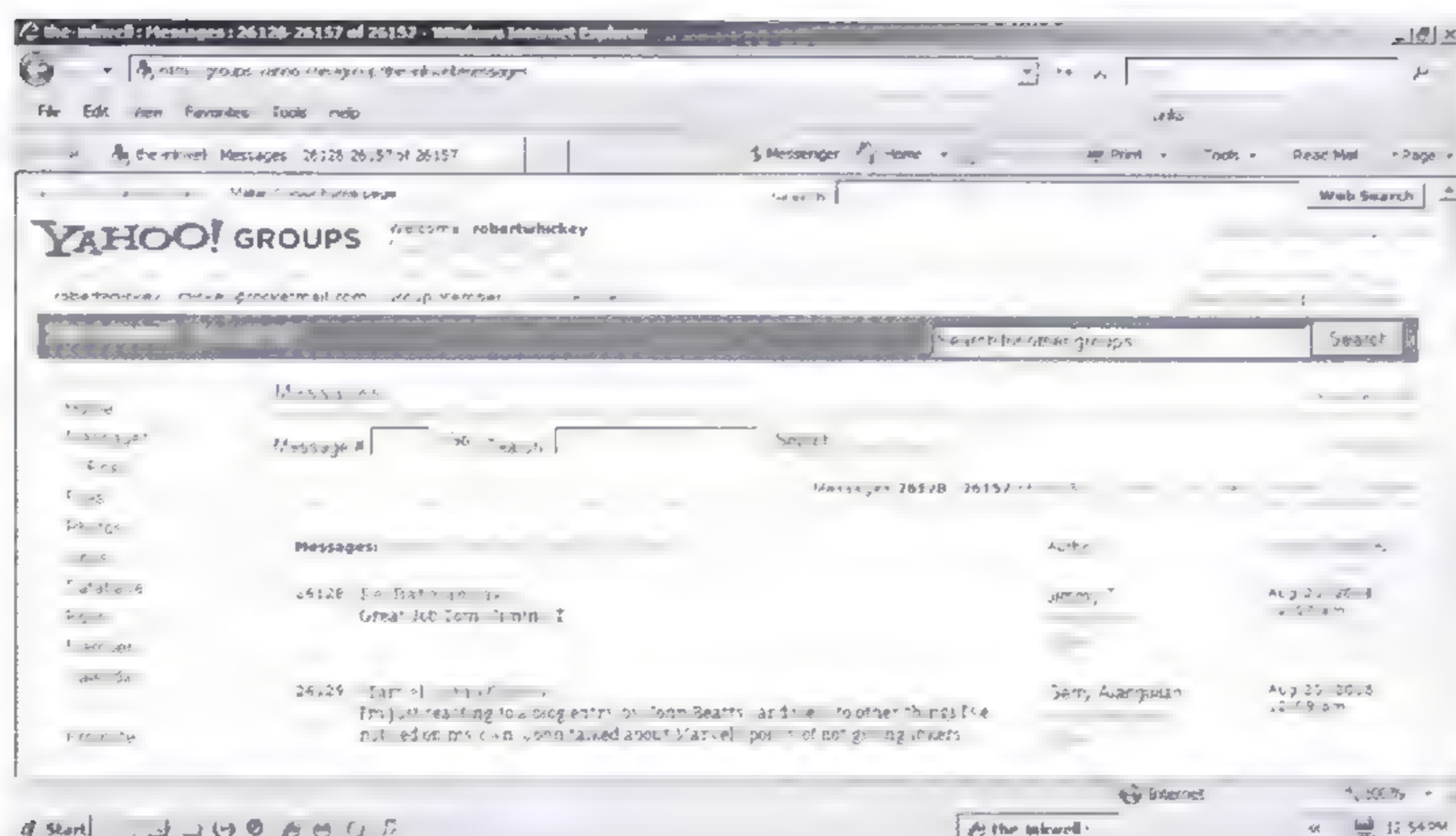


"I really enjoyed the variety and energy that the students gave this project. Congrats!", **Gary Barker**

Sketch

Inkblots "Yahoo"

by Bob Almond



As regular **Inkblots** readers know, I try to mix it up here with inker-centric topics in the hopes that something appeals to and/or helps somebody along the way, whether it be shoptalk and tips of the trade material or my own personal career experiences. But for this column I'm probably due for a more visual topic, inking being a visual medium and all, so I thought I'd give you a break from Bob Almond Central this time around and focus on an interesting discussion thread that came up in a mailing list I'm on along with other established inkers, creators and ambitious artists trying to learn the craft called Yahoo's "**The Inkwell**": <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/the-inkwell/>

In this thread veteran and popular mainstream inkmaster **Sean Parsons** had showcased his work over **Mike Wieringo's** cover pencil art for Twomorrow's *Modern Masters* book spotlighting Mike. **P.J. Magalhaes** subsequently asked the following question about his approach to lineweight distribution in his work on this image after he himself had inked an image over **Russ Heath** pencils:

*"On a side note, I've wondered something for a while now. I assume it's just a difference in style, and have never read a discussion on the topic, but when I ink I try to keep the lines thinner on the side closest to the light source and thicker away from it. In my piece, the top of (Russ) Heath's raised leg isn't as thickly contoured as the underside. On **Spider-Man** in your *Modern Masters* piece, for example, you have a thicker line on the top of the forearm that is touching the rock than you do on the underside/wrist area. And the thickest line on him is the bend of the shoulders but*

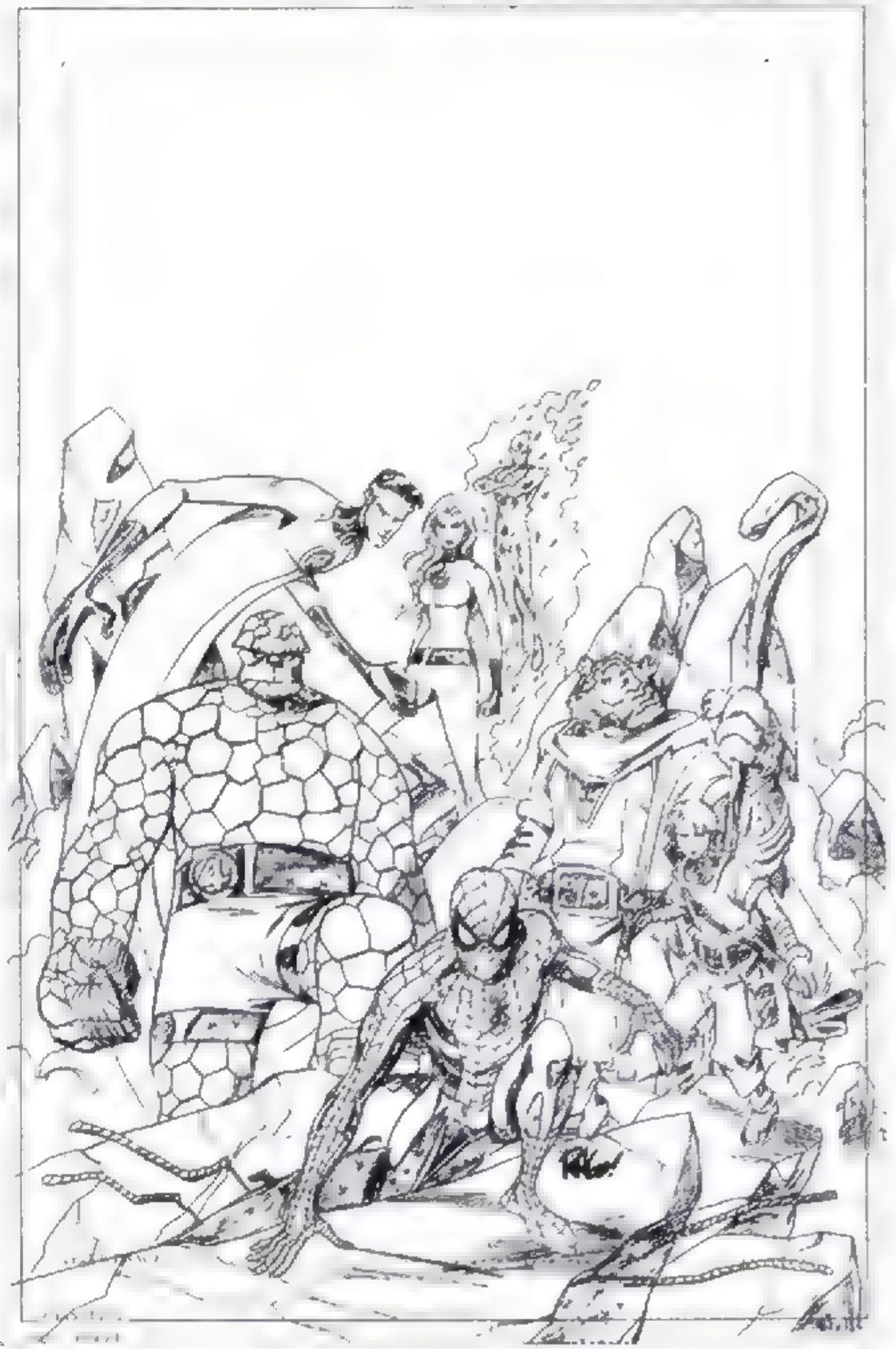
thin on the groin and under leg area, while I would reverse these. I know it is done by many pros and visually works well, but I don't understand the rules of it. I'd like to incorporate some of this technique into my inks since it has a lot of visual energy to it. Anyone feel free to chime in on this one, please."

And chime in they did as Sean himself responded to explain his work:

*"The truth of the matter is I broke a golden rule. My guess is that the true champs like **Bob Mc(Leod)**, **Bob A.(lmond)**, **Mcstink (Mark McKenna)** and their ilk might not have to resort to such petty trickery. I simply do what works for me. By pencil dictation the light source was on high left and while I could bs something about Spidey's left shoulder and say that the angle of his head and the slope of the shoulder muscle created that thick line, I wouldn't want to lie. I did it to pull Spidey forward from the figure behind him. There were competing thicknesses on the tiger tutu and Peter's shoulder and I didn't want them to melt together in the color oven. Bob McC can testify that once inking was about storytelling and making solid fundamental drawing decisions but has more and more become something else. With a solid artist like Ringo, who made solid decisions in the penciling stage, I felt like it was my job to focus on the style and surface of his great structure on this one. Having sputtered around justifying my thick shoulder decision... let me show the final version I sent to the colorist back in June. And, sorry. I wasn't trying to trick anyone or anything. I simply*



Modern Master Cover Inks and Pencils side-by-side



sent the wrong link in to the group last time around. I originally gave Wieringo two options to choose from for the cover because I, like some of you, questioned my non-popped Spider-man so I went back in and popped him on the board and re-scanned. Below is the version Mike wanted to go with, which admittedly is still flawed as I played with the top contour again as well as thickening the bottom. I just can't ever leave well enough alone."

I replied to this in the thread with:

"See, I don't think that there are set rules to follow like in a playbook, just rules of thumb that a majority might follow. These especially help the novice learning the craft. But once you master this skill of inking one may find the need to deviate. I compare this to how when detractors trashed (Rob) Liefeld back in the day (and still do, but I digress) saying that he distorted his art because he couldn't draw; his fans would say that he was like (Jack) Kirby

since Kirby's stuff was exaggerated/distorted. But it was explained that Kirby mastered drawing and figure drawing decades ago and over time developed a style to play off from that in order to achieve different effects like power, action, dynamics, etc.

This is what Sean does (with his inking). It's what some exclusively quill inkers do. What (Klaus) Janson does. Sometimes in my inks I have played up more to the very defined stylings and line weights of a penciler if I feel that they know what they're doing although I still tried to throw some 'traditional' weights in there if I felt that it would look better. And I certainly have made a line heavier to pop it forward in space from another line/object...this is setting contrasts in space and that would, IMHO, take precedence over the lightsource-concentrated inking practice in that section. Plus the color artist today would probably set the light source properly and hopefully not be thrown off by that one weight."

Jeremy Colwell further commented with:

"I'm an analytical, dissecting type of thinker so I was interested in the academic reasoning behind your (Sean's) choices. It seems to be a "know the rules to break the "rules" situation. In this case it was to help Spider-man separate from the elements behind him and that seems to be a key aspect of good inking. I don't find it trickery so much as another technique in your arsenal. I've started beefing up all my contours even though I know some of the interior lines should be heavier based on lighting just because it reads better. I never would have deviated from the rules that much even as recently as a year ago, but now I guess I'm more comfortable in my decision-making ability to know when it's okay. You're at a level somewhere that is comfortable contouring the way you do."

Okay, we're back to my column now. PJ's concern's mirrored mine early on in my career and I followed light sources to help define the forms, but occasionally I noticed scenarios where I had to try something else. Like, if you have overhead lighting and you have a shape, say an arm, that's vertical in direction...do you ink both sides of the arm contours the same weight? I learned that while that is an option, the shape loses it's sense of form and weight that way and reads better and is even aesthetically more pleasing to the eye whenever one side of a form has a weight that contrasts the other side. A light source is always a good rule of thumb and default theory to adhere to but when it comes to where a shape fits in space, or when you want to emphasize weight or density, like from muscle mass and bone mass (something Sean hinted at regard-

ing Spidey's shoulders), or, again as Sean stated, you want to enhance the clarity of an image like with overlaps from other forms and figures, then these other aspects may need to take a priority over the lighting considerations.

This is something that will develop over time. I realized this when I would look at other veteran inkers and see them throw out the default rules. I noticed some inkers who were using their own approach and creating their own style. Like those who use just pen quills and have randomly distributed weights or, as with some artists who ink their own pencils, NO weights at all like **Mike Mignola**, **Craig Rousseau**, and **Sean Phillips**, just to name three examples. But, like these vets, you need to pay your dues. If you 'rebel' too soon from learning the foundations of inking, expect a little criticism.

As the adage goes, 'rules were meant to be broken'. In inking, it's just a matter of knowing when to make that call.

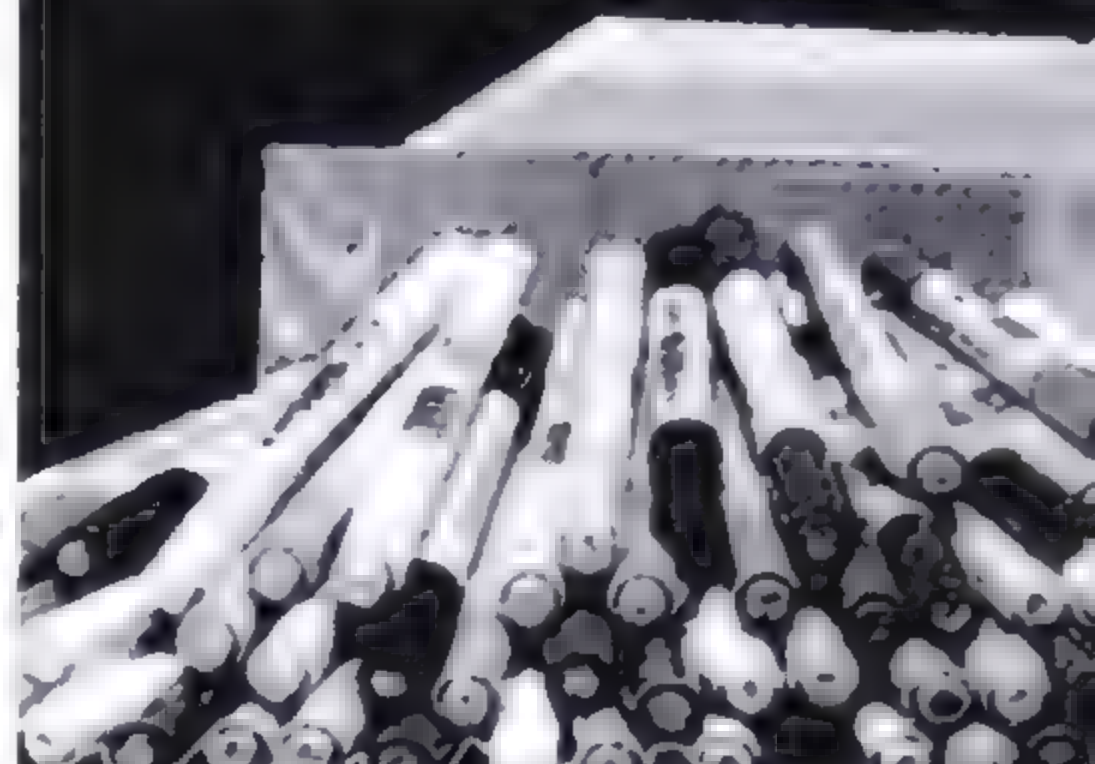
****Special thanks to PJ Magalhaes, Jeremy Colwell, and Sean Parsons for permission to print their messages. And you can visit Sean's site at <http://www.roughhouseink.com>**

We'd like to make an apology to Adam Hughes for last issue's Inkblots column "The Inkwell Awards". In it, the Inkwell Awards committee of seven was named but in the place of member Adam Hughes, inexplicably, Steve McNiven was listed instead. Steve was never a member and, with all due respect, should not have been mentioned. We sincerely appreciated Adam's endorsement of our cause this year and we hope for more invaluable support in the future.

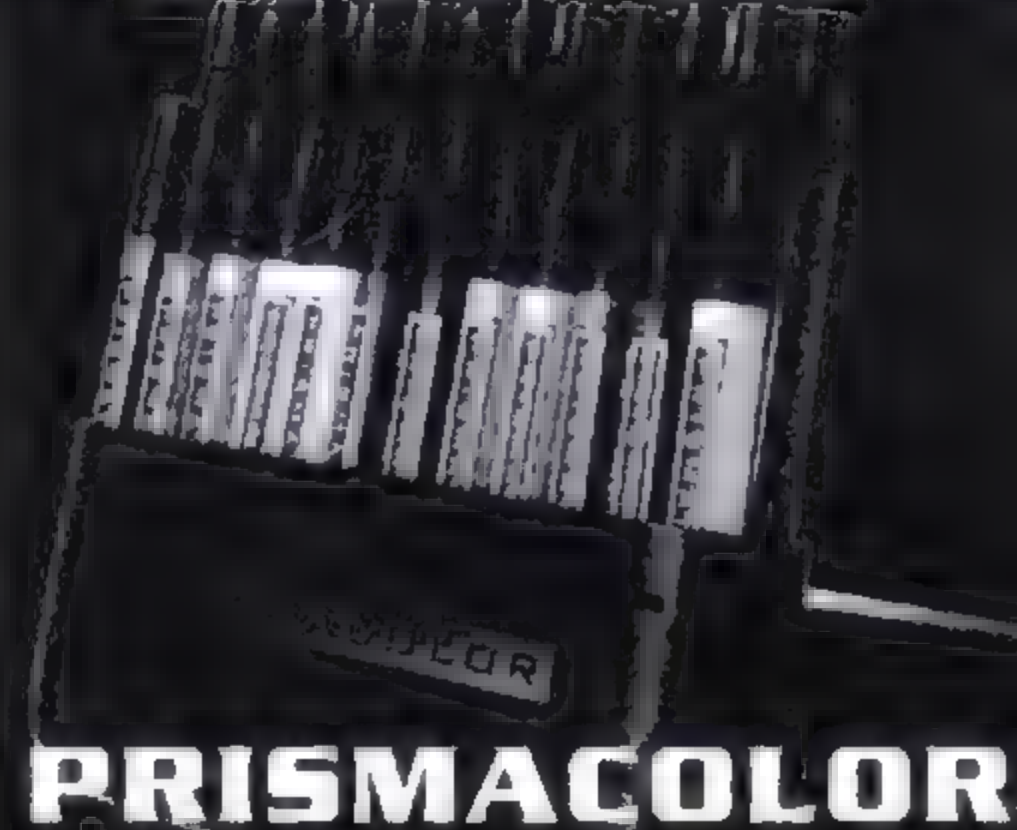
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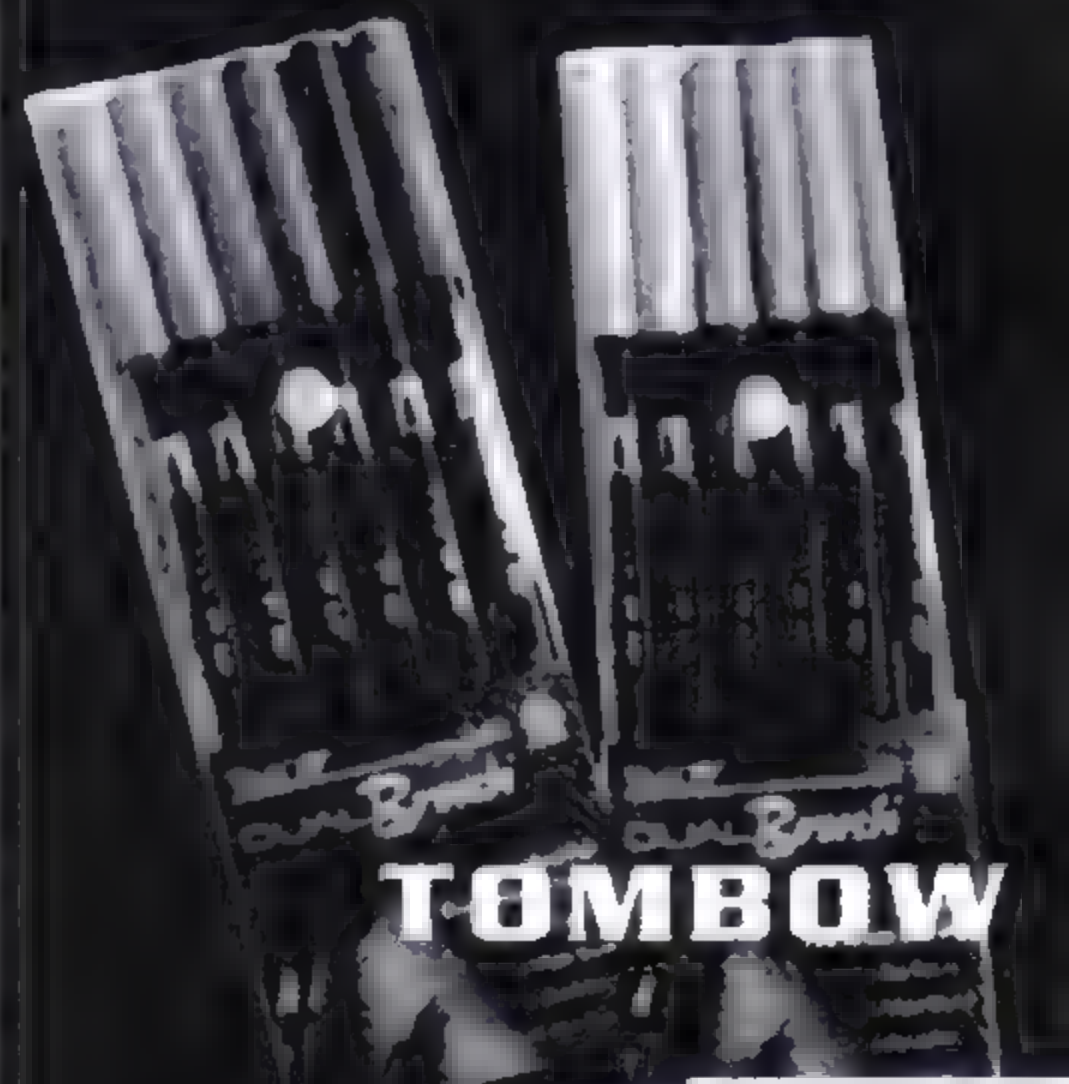
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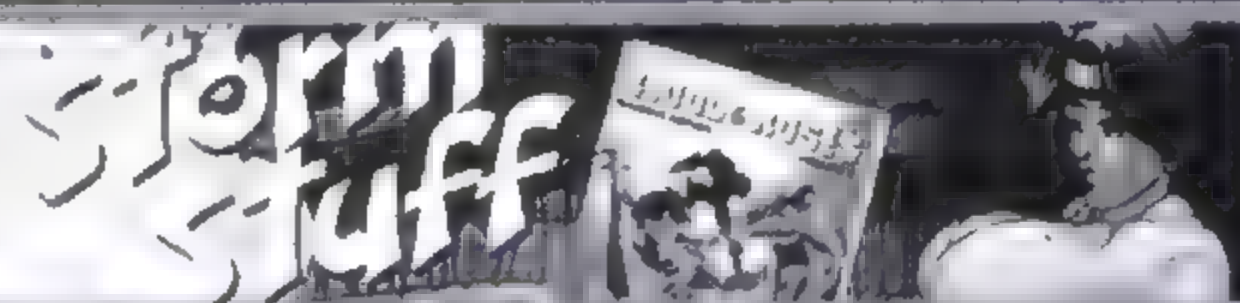


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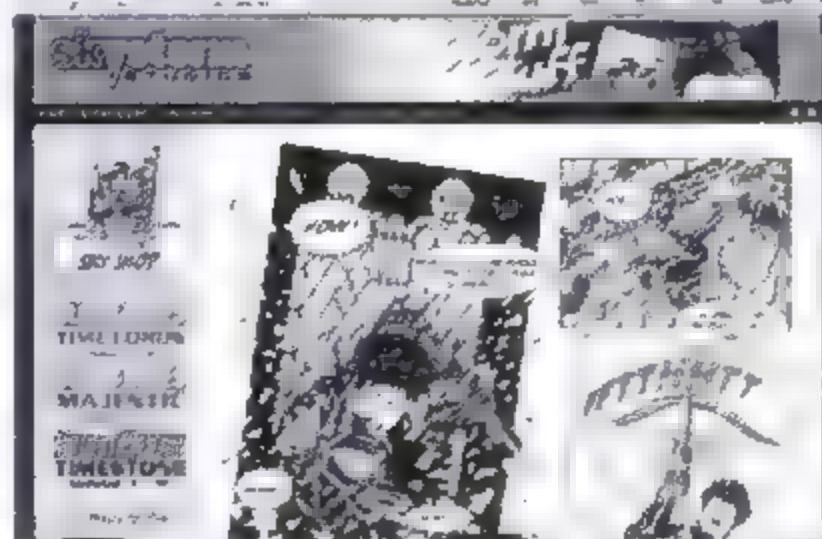


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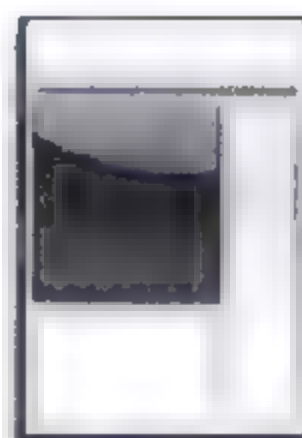
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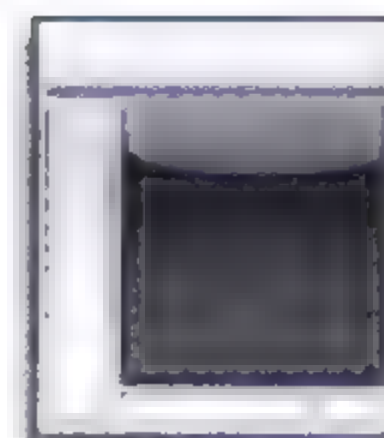
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This would be a good time to go over the different formats that Tyler Martin has designed.

- **Standard Edition:** If you've read online comic strips, this is the layout you are familiar with: a single blog column and a single sidebar under the comic. Works well with a horizontal or full-page comic.
- **3-Column Edition:** The much-anticipated 3-column version with a wider page than the Standard Edition, this layout also gives you a second sidebar to fill.
- **Vertical Edition:** For a narrow or tall comic, perhaps a stacked 4-panel or mini-comic page, this is the layout for you. It looks like the standard layout, but in this one the sidebar comes up beside the comic, filling in the extra space.
- **Vertical 3-Column Edition:** Just as the 3-column does for the Standard Edition, this layout adds an extra sidebar to the Vertical Edition, so the comic gets sandwiched between the two sidebars.

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• **Graphic Novel Edition:** This takes the Standard Edition, which can work well for large full-page comics and adds an extra sidebar to the left that extends up beside the comic. This allows you to display stuff alongside your large full-page comics. Can also be used for those wanting a third column added to the Standard Edition but whose comic is not wide enough to span the wider layout.

The great thing about ComicPress is that it is changeable. You can modify the colors, add a header banner, change the text, and add directional buttons and much more. Instead of getting into all the changes, you should go to the forums at <http://lunchboxfunnies.com/forum/viewforum.php?f=7comicpress/forum>. My experience has been everyone is very helpful and willing to answer questions that you can't find the answers to by just reading the post. When I set up ComicPress 2.5, I had a ton of questions and every one was answered quickly with all the information that I needed to create a good-looking site.

Be patient and use your resources. ComicPress will be the best thing you'll use on the web for publishing comics.

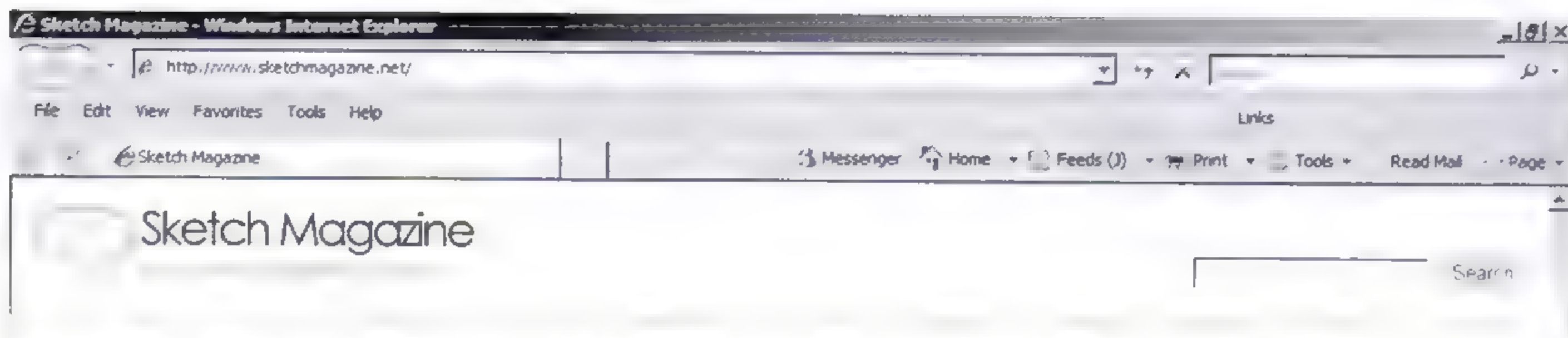
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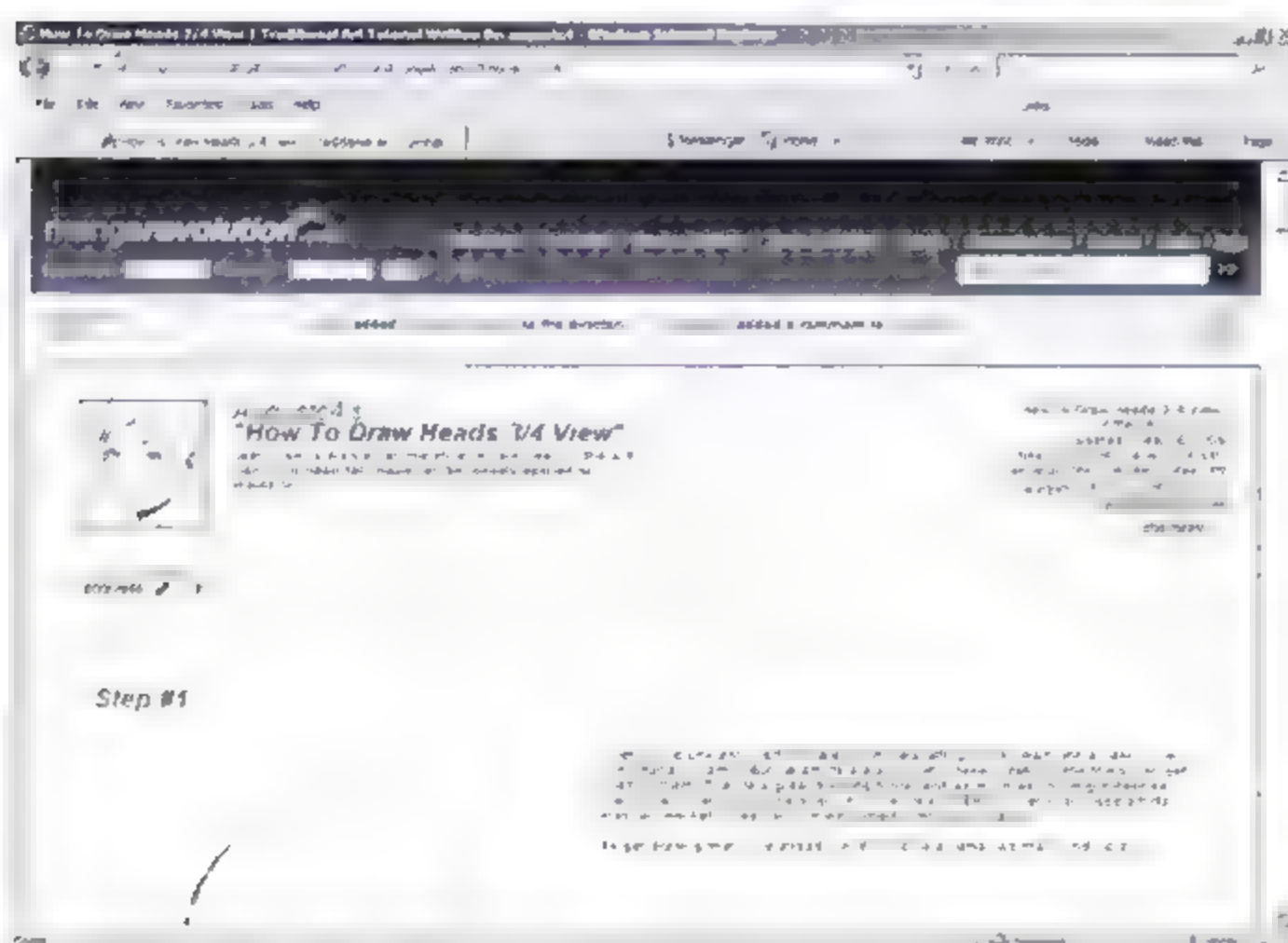
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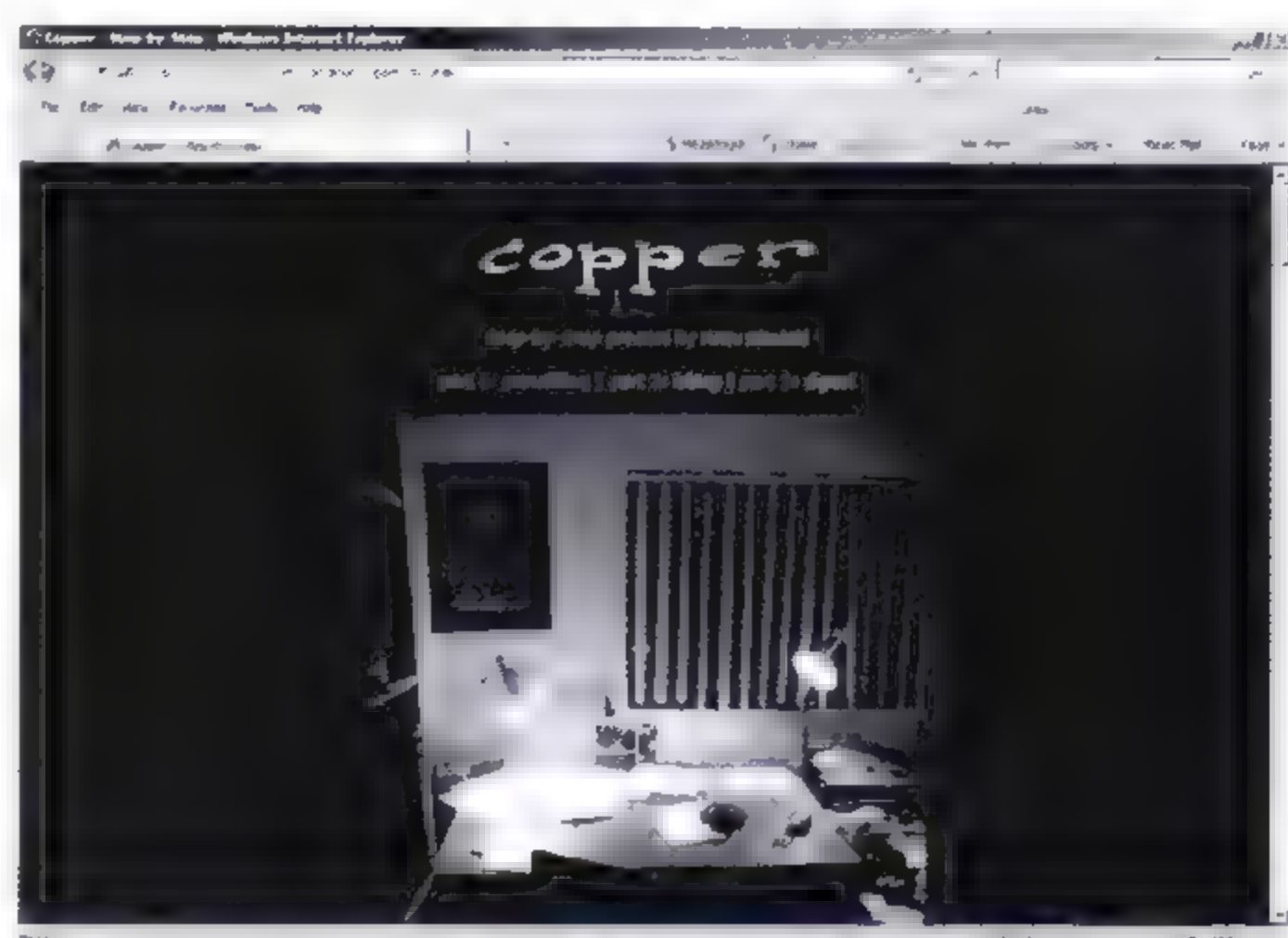
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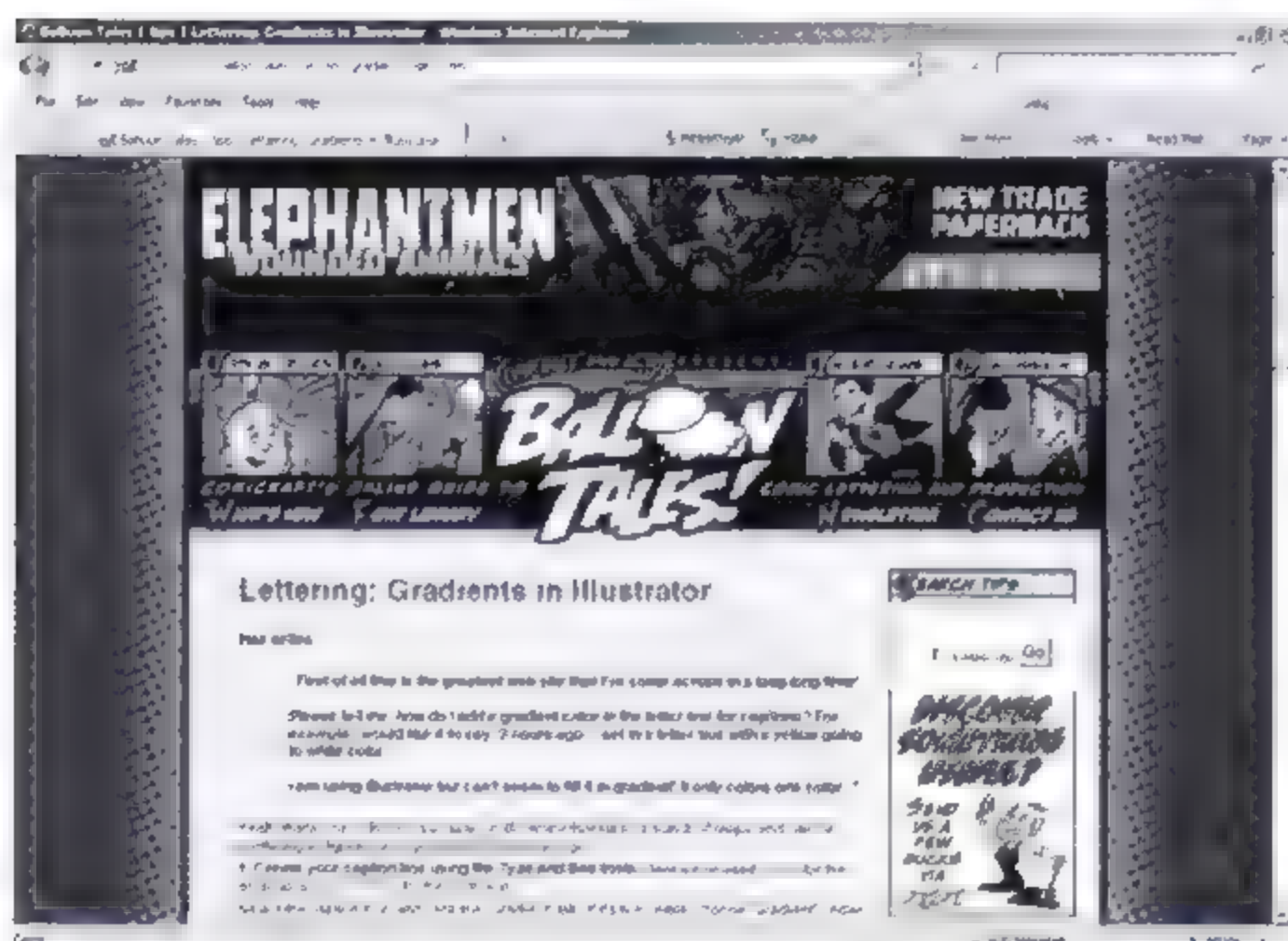
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PANELING, PACING, & LAYOUT IN COMICS & MANGA #1 by Rivkah

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Letters Forum

Bill and Sketch crew,

Thanks for another great issue, and for the printing of my letter therein! As always the mag was right on target to what interests us creators most, be you a writer, artist, or both!

Your answers to my questions in my letter were well put and very helpful and, I must add, gave new impetus to my quest.

In this letter I would like to address the formation of associations, forums or, if you will, guilds. For a little over a year I and the fellow members of the Bart Thompson Approbation Comics have been trying to gather together all local creators and those who want to be creators in order to form an association or forum but have yet to achieve this.

We've, that is Approbation, been holding weekly meetings every Sunday at our main library branch for over 5 years. There we discuss ideas, relative news and happenings, critiques each other's work, set agendas, and generally encourage each other's endeavors.

As said, about a year ago, we decided to open this to any and all local creators or those to wish to learn about or hone their craft. In other words, share what we have learned and experienced and learned from others.

It was to be a place or forum to vent frustrations, find new pathways, form friendships, encourage each other, learn from each other's

successes and mistakes, and for general fellowship with like interest-minded individuals.

I know there are many more creators and want-to-be's in our area, such as The Feral Comics Group, Streetlight Graphics, and various other individuals and groups, and for the life of me, I cannot understand why such individuals would not wish to form such an association!?

All I do know is I would not be as near to my small accomplishments as I am without the people who encouraged me, guided me, and shared their knowledge and friendship.

Going it alone is tough! Wouldn't it be better to have many voices in the crowd to cheer you on and if need be help you along? Or is it that egos get in the way? That "I'm the Next Big Thing" attitude that I hear about oh-so-often!

Maybe it's my age, but I feel you should be a bit more humble in your approach. Concentrate more on honing your craft and practicing your skills by producing output, than by claiming you're already there and have no need of further input!

I know that for every page I produce, every comic that I finish, the next just keeps getting better!! For I am learning from every conversation and critique from and by my peers! I'm proud of every comic I've had a hand in producing! Maybe not so much the artwork I

did within its pages, but in the fact that I did it! Did my best at that time and skill level and the people I did the work for like it enough to request more!

I don't worry about being "The Next Big Thing"; I just concentrate on being the best I can be! If and when recognition comes, it will be because others thought well of my work, not because I thought it so!

So, let's put egos aside for now, humble ourselves before the craft, join together in true community and become the voice, not be the voice!

Until Next,
Steven Doty

Wow, Steven, you write an interesting letter, bringing up several points I can latch onto here.

*First, you and anyone else who reads my editorials will know that I'm big on collaboration and cooperation, forming associations and friendships that have stayed with me for several years and still have impact in my life and work. From my days in Elfquest fandom to being a member of **Apa-5** to joining up with fellow **X-Apa** members **Tom** and **Mary Bierbaum** on a comics for **Sky Comics** called **Dead Kid Adventures**, I've reaped the benefits of those associations and friendships. And hopefully in the meantime, others have as well.*

So, to address your points a little, I'm going to give you a Crash Course in Bill's Fan Days...

When I was in college, my best friend **Alan Gillispie** and I got into Elfquest fandom. We joined one of the "holts", Timberlake Holt, and dove into writing and drawing stories and illos with our ourselves. Somewhere in there, we joined several other holts and contributed to the official fan club pub. For me, it was a creative time that spurred me into action and new realms of creative output.

After college, I joined Apa-5 just as the guys who would form Dark Horse Comics were getting out, but that summer in 1986 I did meet **Chris Warner** and **Mark Badger** at the **Chicago Comicon**. To this day, I still trade messages with them, but the friendships I made in my apa days are still with me. **Robin Ator** immediately springs to mind, a longtime friend and now a contributor to Sketch Magazine.

I was also a member of X-Apa and that's where I "met" Tom and Mary Bierbaum.

I also did some of my own small-press comics, called Amalgam, which was a collection of collaborations mostly...

So, skip ahead a few years and Tom and Mary are working on their own title for Sky Comics called Dead Kid Adventures. They knew me and my inks and recommended me to their publisher, some guy named **Bob Hickey**...

And guess what, I'm still here...

There have been some down points in all this, too. For example, when I was a pup in Apa-5, I opened my big yap and the

Emergency Officer, the second-in-command so-to-speak, quit because I kept on about what I saw as a lack of his participation. That is, **what I saw**...

So, **John McClimons**, if you ever read this, I'm sorry for being a jerk. If there's a positive in that episode, I learned from it. Truly I did.

And there were others.

If I were you, I would continue to focus on your own efforts. If the other creators in your area, don't want to join in, maybe they will someday, but you can't dictate the path they take. As long as they know that you're available for feedback and friendship, that's really all you can hope for. They may have their own reasons for why they aren't joining. Focus on you and your group and reap those benefits. The cream will rise and possibly along the way, others will see what a positive experience it can be and stop by one afternoon for a get-together. You never know!

In the meantime, I would suggest you check out other forums online, such as **Art Unleashed**, the Blue Line/Sketch Magazine forum! www.bloodandroses.com/forums

There are many others, so get involved if one appeals to you!

And that goes for the rest of you, too.
Bill

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CONTRACT

by Bill Nichols

Sketch: Tell us about *Contract*. Who's involved and what's it about?

Garan: The basic story concept behind *Contract* is that of a future world driven totally by capitalism. In the *Contract* world almost every service you can think of has been farmed out to the lowest bidder: police, military, deep space rescue, you name it. For a "Cyber-Merc" team, jobs can range from bodyguarding to counter-terrorism to salvage operations and more. The potential for adventure is endless. *Contract* follows the adventures of one of these Cyber-Merc teams, the Stellar Rangers, who are trying to make an honest living in a world full of corruption.

As far as who is involved with this title, we have an impressive list of artists and creators. Our guest artist for *Contract*'s first issue is **Dave Ross**. Initially issue #1 was planned as our issue #0, a short lead-in to the main story. Dave had such a great time with it we expanded

his work into a full first issue. Dave has worked as an illustrator for Marvel, DC and Dark Horse on titles like: *Spider-Man*, *Daredevil*, *Batgirl*, *Catwoman*, *Punisher*, *Captain America*, *Aliens*, *Star Wars* and more.

Sal Vellutto, who you probably remember for his run on Marvel's *Black Panther*, has contributed a back-up as well as **Kevin Sharpe** whose previous works include Marvel's *X-Treme X-Men*, DC's *Superman* and *Batman* and Crossgens *Mystic* and *Sigtl*. Kevin has some great-looking stuff and is working on a "Jessie Garrett" one-shot and let me tell you, they are some nice-looking pages. This one-shot also has **Mark McKenna**, a veteran inker for over 20 years, contributing his impressive talent. If you haven't seen Mark's inks before, you haven't been reading comic books!

Yvel Guichet, better known for work on Dark Horse's

ArchEnemies, *Aquaman*, *JLA*, *Man of Steel*, *Relative Heroes*, *Legion Worlds*, and *Batman: Harley Quinn* for DC comics plus various Valiant comics issues, has penciled a "Tsumi One-shot" with inks by the legendary **Joe Rubinstein**.

But **Ariel Padilla**, the artist on *Tomo*, is putting out some amazing-looking stuff. He has really stepped up to the plate and every time I look at a new page, I get chills. He has a very dynamic style that captures some of the Manga- and Anime-like qualities that lead themselves so well to *Contract*.

As for myself, I attended the Joe Kubert School of Cartooning where I met my co-writer for *Contract*, **Charles Shell**. We always said how we would like to work together after we got out of school. After a few years emailing back and forth, I finally approached Shell with the concept. He really liked it and soon we were off and running. Lastly, **Kirk Outerbridge**, a longtime friend

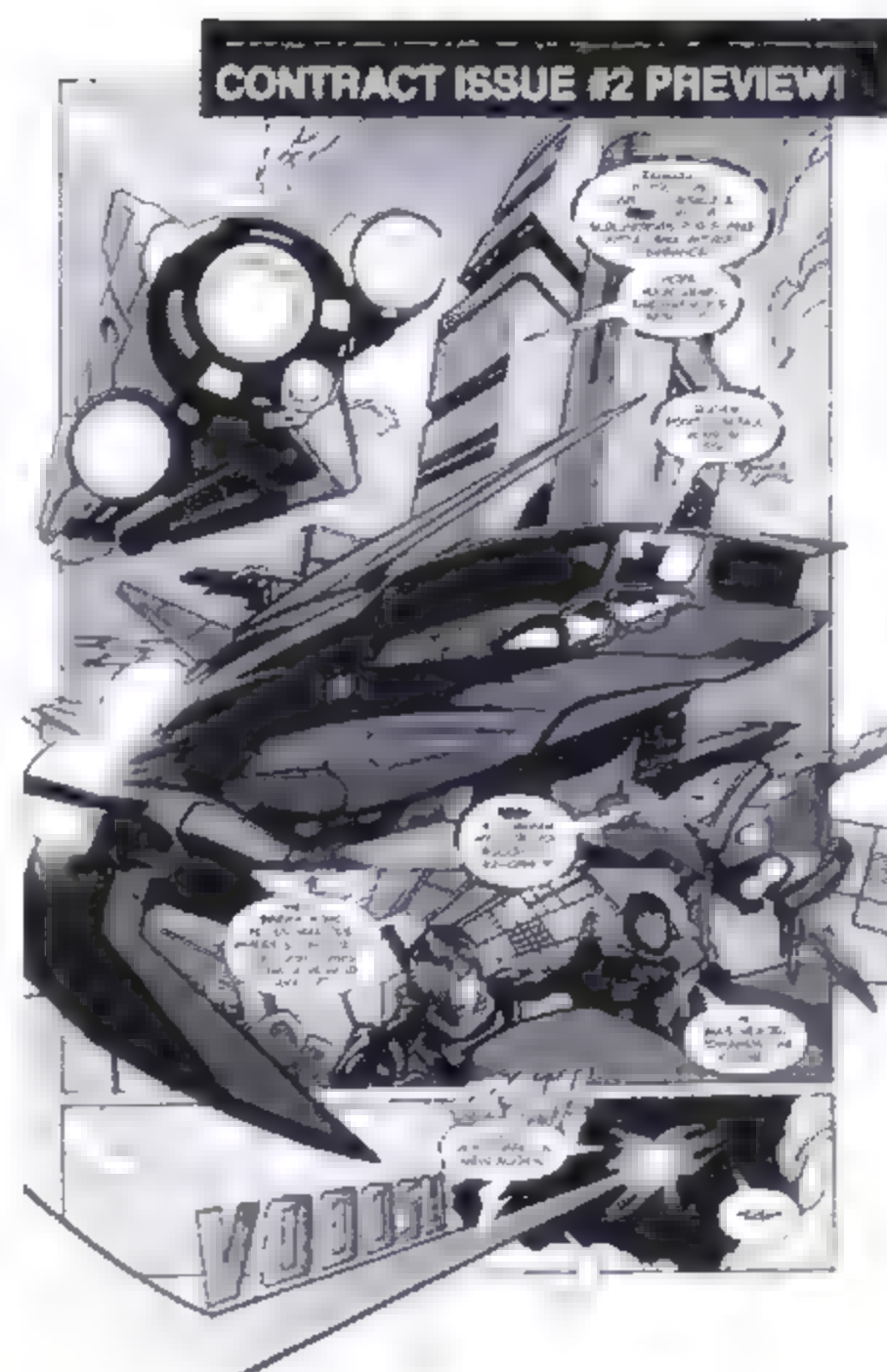
and great writer who helped develop the initial *Contract* universe, rounds out the team as Editor. He runs quality control keeping the grammar proper, the plot-holes filled and the story tight.

Sketch: What has been the process of creating this? What are the steps it goes through? Writer to artist, etc.

Garan: Sometimes a particular artist is kept in mind for a specific story and we tailor the script to their style. I will usually give Shell an outline of what I want the story to consist of, the basic plot and theme. He will then write up a rough draft, which Kirk, the editor, and I will then polish. It is sent back a few times between the three of us, ideas are kicked around, scenes added and removed until we are finally happy with a solid story as an end result.

The script and reference package is then sent off to the artist who works up thumbnails for approval. We find that this helps save on corrections later when pencils are closer to being finished. Depending on the artist, (some prefer to ink there own work) the pencils are then sent to the inker who finishes the page in black and white and then it's onto the colorist. The letterer is usually working on the pages at the same time adding in the dialogue and sound effects. Finally the page is put together, final tweaks are made and the book compiled and readied for the printer.

Sketch: Thanks, Garan, for the inside look at how *Contract* has come to be. We'll look forward to it!



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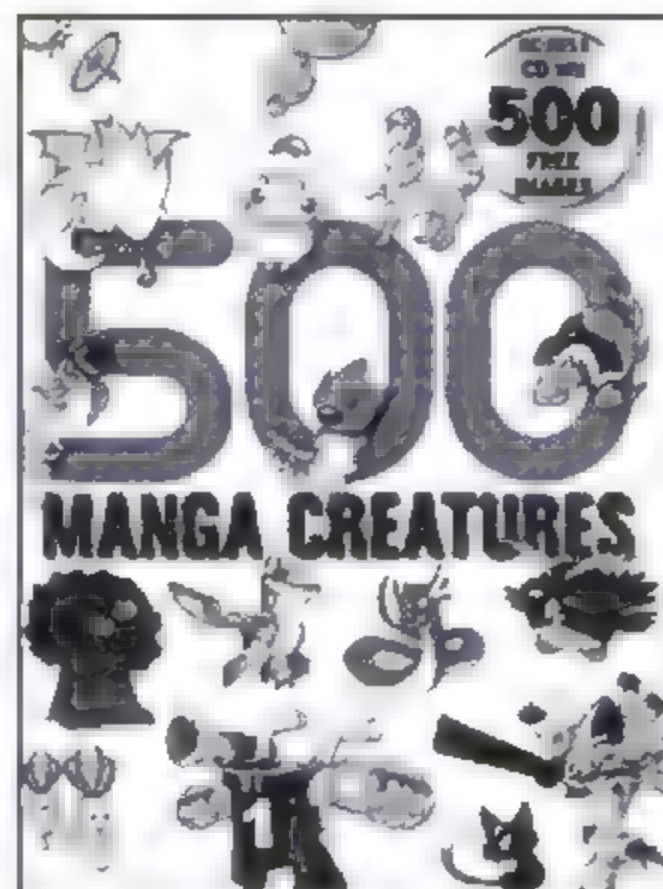


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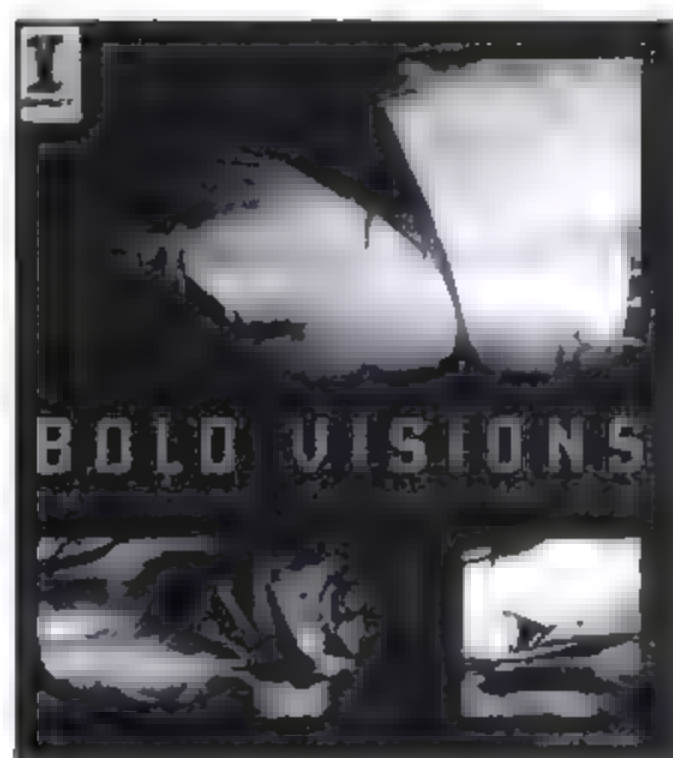


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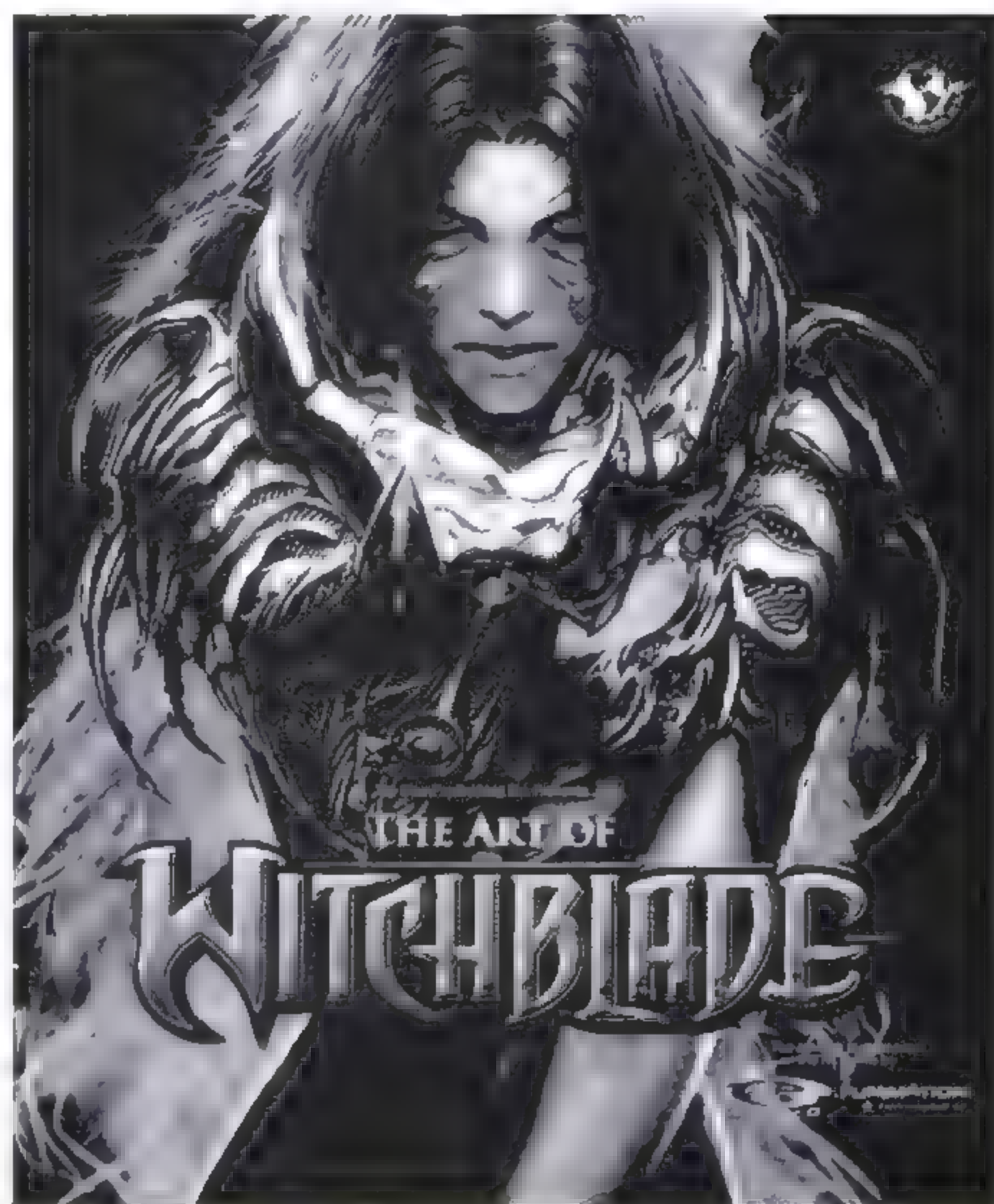
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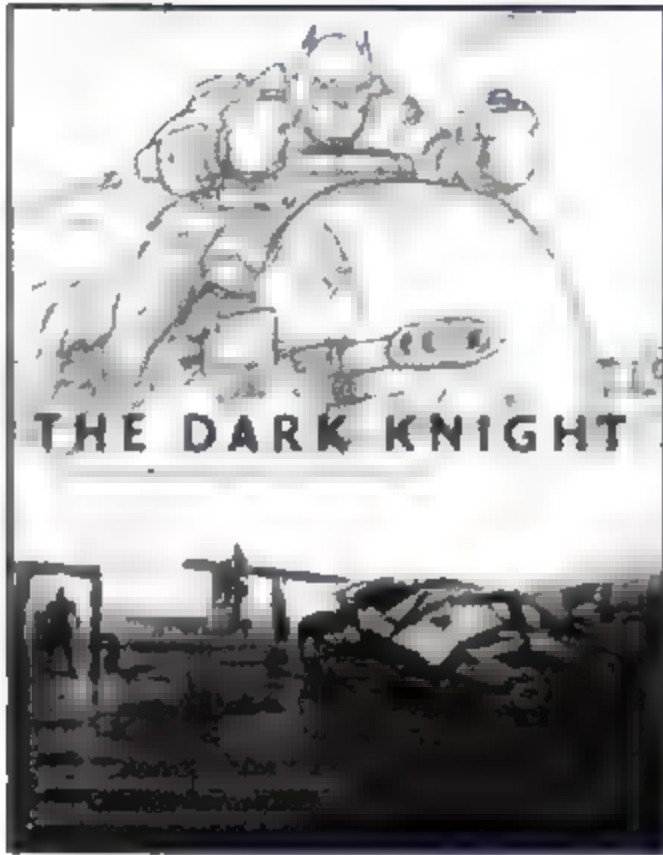


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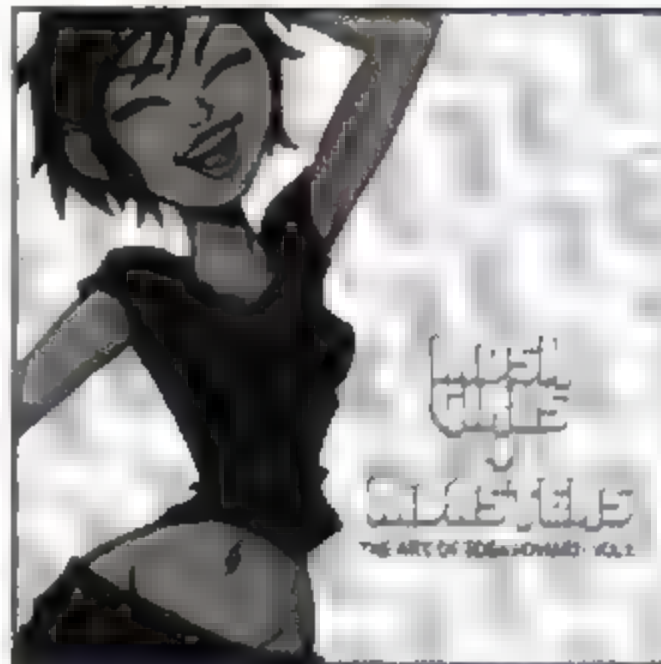
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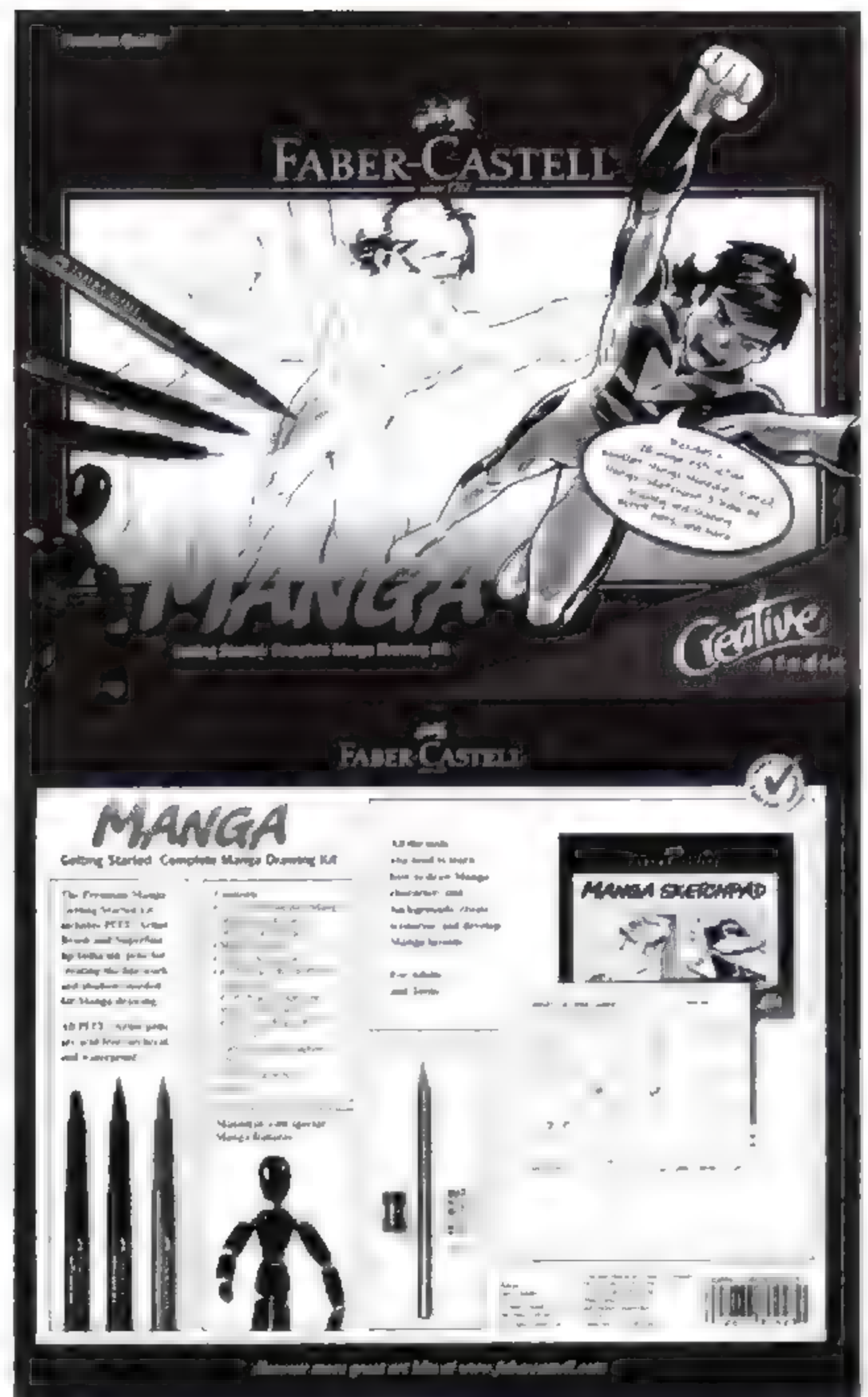
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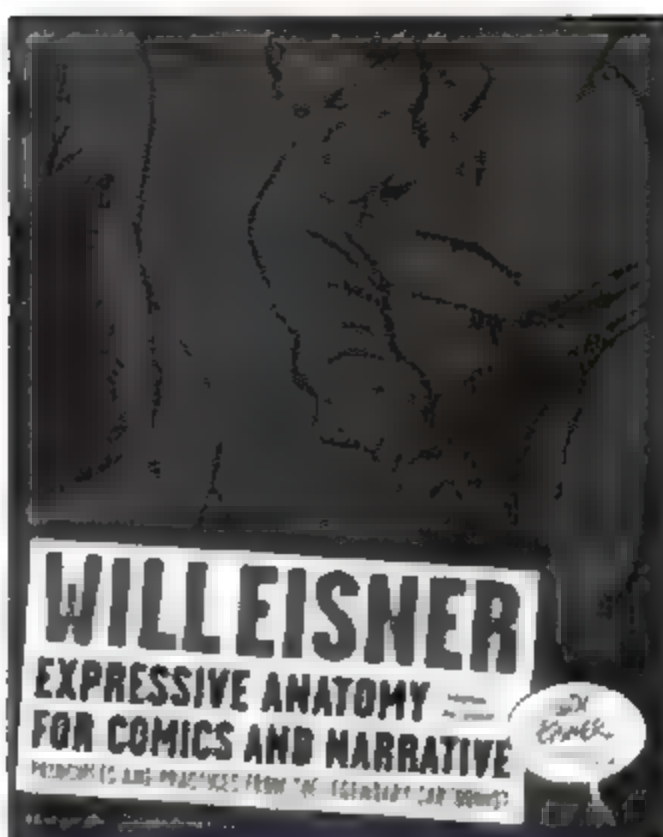
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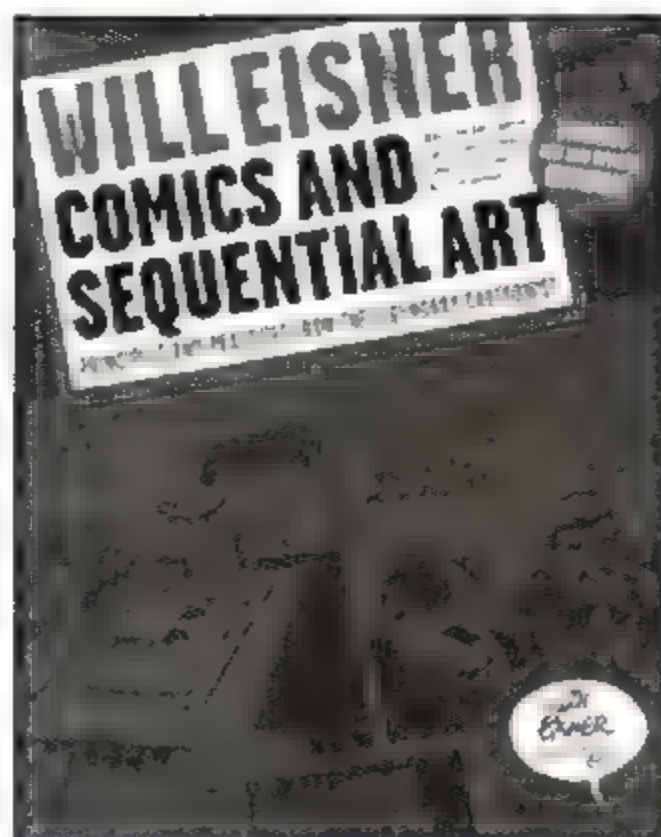
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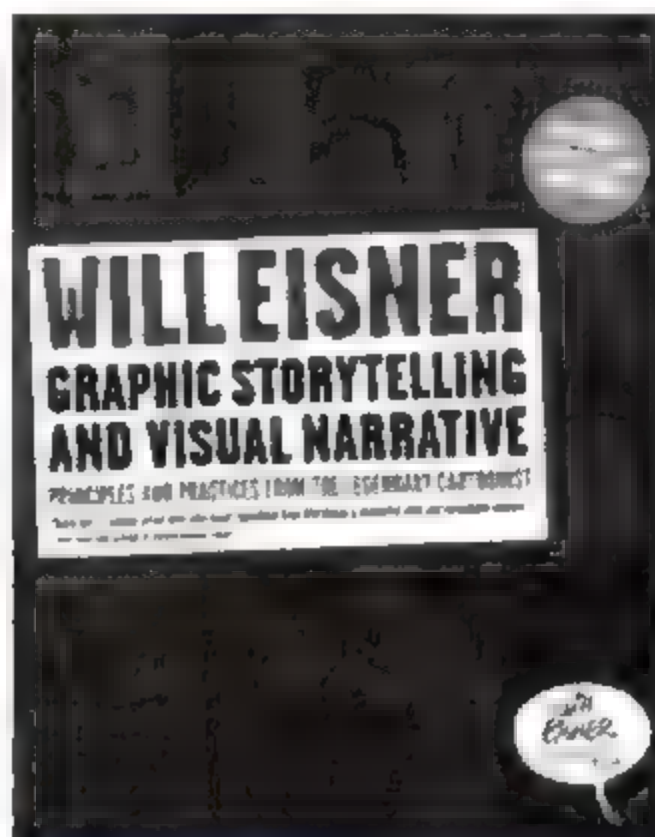
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Coloring

COLORING LINEART IN PHOTOSHOP

by Anthony D Lee

Hello there. My name's Anthony D Lee. I'm a professional colorist from England, home of tea and crumpets, 3-day summers and color with an extra "U" in it. But I'll drop that extraneous letter today, as we're all mates here.

What I'll be showing in this article is one of the many methods of coloring line art with the wonder that is Photoshop. It is something that, at first glance, looks incredibly difficult. However, once you see what's actually involved it should prove to be relatively straightforward, and more importantly, quite fun to do. I'll do my best to explain it simply and without confusion.

I would recommend that you make yourself familiar with Photoshop before starting to add

color to your art. Find all the tools you'll be needing, and learn how to select colors from the tool bar, and using the CMYK value boxes to choose a color. Again, it looks daunting, but is really quite intuitive once you get into it.

There are also a number of books out there that deal with comic coloring, each of which shows different ways to achieve the same end result. My start and finish process, for example, is pretty much that from the DC guide to coloring, but the actual color process has been picked up from several sources. Take the time to experiment with the steps, and you'll find a style that fits you perfectly.

Also, a graphics tablet is pretty much an essential. You can use a

mouse, but it's so much better and easier if you're using something that is, in effect, a pen. There are a ton of choices on the market, so scout around and find the right one for you. I personally use tablets made by Wacom, they seem to be one of the best makes to buy, and have a great range that won't break the bank.

In my Photoshop setup, apart from the standard tool menu, I have the following tabs open: Layers, Channels and Swatches. These are pretty much all the stuff I use in the process of coloring and can all be found under the "Window" option at the top of the program window. There's also a space along the top for you to dock these tabs in, so they don't get in the way all the time.

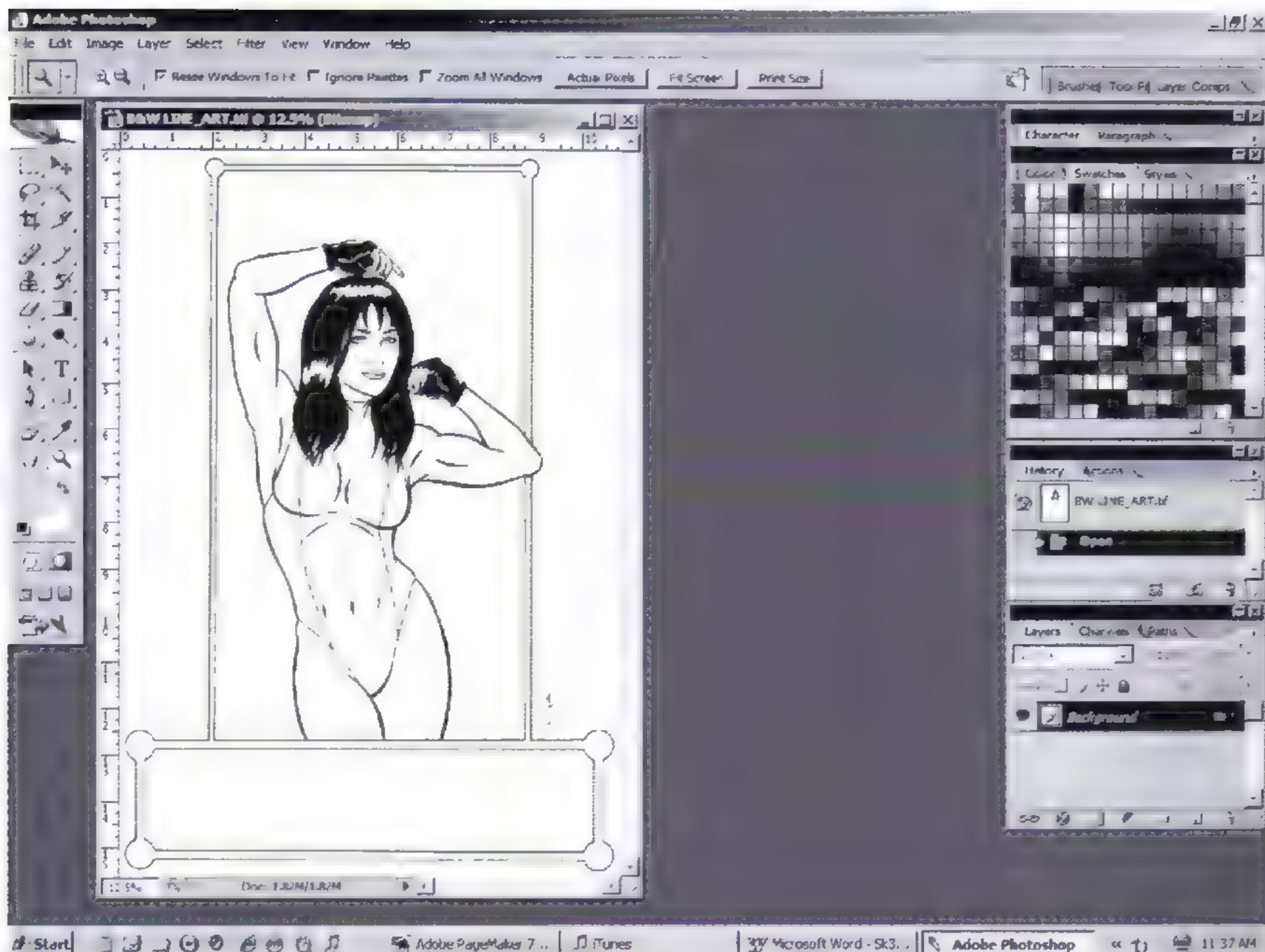


Image 1 Getting Set Up

STEP 1: GETTING SET UP

This is pretty complicated for a first step, but it sounds harder than it is... honest.

OK, so... here we have our line art, of a sassy looking She Hulk. (This is the first time I've ever drawn Shulkie, so be kind...!) It's scanned in at 450dpi on Line Art (sometimes called Bitmap) setting so that the only colors in the art are pure black and pure white. This gives a wonderfully sharp and crisp piece of art to work on.

Again, there are many ways to set up a page... this is just the way I do it.

The first thing to do is to convert the piece to the correct coloring format. Along the top row of options, pick "Image", then "Mode", then "Grayscale". An option box will come up, saying "Size Ratio". Make sure this is set to 1, and then click OK. Next, go back to "Image", then "Mode", this time selecting CMYK.

This is the color mode that comics are printed from.

The next step is to set up a copy of your black channel. Open your channels tab, where you'll see the channels laid out. Select just "Black", and right click. From the options it gives, select "Duplicate Channel" which will create a black channel copy.

From there, select the CMYK channel and select all using CTRL and A. Select pure white as your color by clicking on the "Set Foreground Color" selector on the main tool bar. Then click on "Edit", then "Fill", which bring up a dialogue box. Select "Use Foreground Color" and make sure the mode is set to Normal and amount is 100%.

Now you have a pure white page to work on, with the black channel copy "floating" above it. In the channel tab, make sure the eyeball icon is on next to the copy, and that

the CMYK channels are active. The Black copy channel should remain inactive.

If your black copy looks a little grayed out, then click on "Image," "Adjustments", "Levels". Another dialogue box will appear, and in the first box enter the value 25, which makes your art appear black again.

After this step, open the "Layers" tab, double clicking anywhere on the part where it says "background". A Box will open to create a layer, rename the background to "Back". Then make a new layer on top (which I usually call "Characters") using the buttons at the bottom of the tab. This will make life much easier when you come to do your background, as the character stuff won't be touched by anything you do.

Make sure the "Characters" layer is selected, and now you're all set to start coloring!

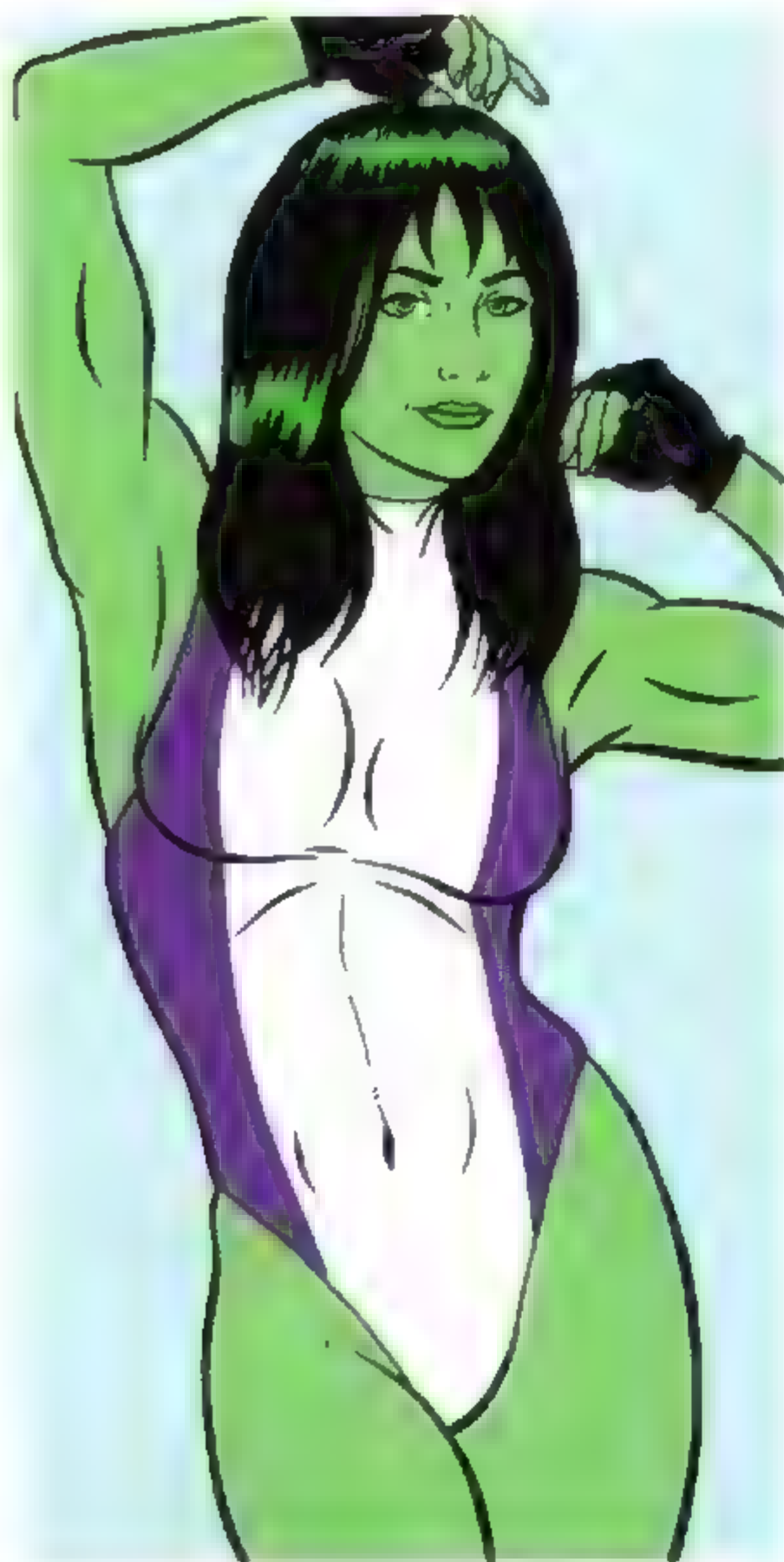
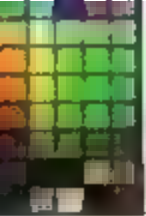


Image 2. Flat Colors

STEP 2: FLAT COLORS

Now that the page is set up correctly, we can get to the fun part. Well, actually, before the fun part comes the flats.

This is exactly what it sounds like: adding the flat colors that you'll be working from. This can be one of the most time-consuming steps, as you'll be going through the entire image and filling in the colors.

Also, I'd recommend selecting a mid-range color for each part, so that you can add shadow and light to it easily.

The lasso tool on the tool bar (shortcut key "L") has a fly out that gives you a few options. The one you want is "Polygonal Lasso". Using this tool, you select the areas you want to fill by drawing a selection underneath the line art. Once the selection is complete, use the flat fill (indicated by the bucket on the toolbar, quick key "G") to place the color into it. It's really that simple for this stage, as all you're doing is adding the basic color blocks. Repeat the process on each layer, and once that's done, the image should look just like figure 1.



Image 3: Airbrushing Tones

STEP 3: AIRBRUSHING TONES

This step is purely optional, but I like to use it, as it gives a less even base tone.

Using the magic wand tool (quick key "W") select the skin tones and, using a soft airbrush set to around 20 on the "Flow" setting, lightly brush in some basic light and shadow, to give a little more form to the flat colors (Figure 2). By using the wand, you can be sure that you won't paint anywhere outside the lines. In some areas, the shading can be barely noticeable, but it all helps to give the image the illusion of a realistic form.

STEP 4: RENDERING THE IMAGE

This is where you'll start to add form to the colors you've already put down, and you'll see the benefit of choosing that mid-range color as the base tone.

For this step, let's concentrate on the face, as the process is exactly the same throughout the rest of the image.

Using the Polygonal Lasso again, start selecting areas where shadows would fall. Once an area is selected, use the fill tool again, this time set to "Gradient." (Many of the tool bar buttons have fly outs to select different types of the same toolset). In the options that appear across the top of the screen, just above the art, set the gradient to "Foreground to Transparent" by clicking on the drop down menu, and then set the style of gradient you want. (There are several types, including "Linear" and "Radial").

Then, simply drag the gradient across your selected area from where you want it to start. The gradient fill blends into the flat color the further it goes, giving a more rounded look to the artwork. Once your



Image 4. Rendering the Image

fill is done, de-select the area by using "CTRL" and "D"

These selections and gradient fills are known as "cuts" and are the most widely used of all the coloring techniques. Look at most mainstream comics, and this is the style that's probably being used. Study the colors in your comics and you'll get a pretty good feel for how they were done. (There are, of course, many differing styles .. but that's an article for another day...)

From there, it's a case of building up the shadows by selecting more areas, (and also possibly using a slightly darker shade) and using the gradient fill tool. It's the same process with highlights. With some highlights however, it's best to select the area with the tool marked simply "Lasso" on the fly out options, as this gives a freehand selection where your shapes can look more organic in nature.

As you can see from figures 3 - 7, when you start to add more layers of shadowing and highlights, the image starts to look more and more three dimensional. When you're done, you can use the "Blur" tool (quick key "R", select blur on the fly out options) to soften the edges of your cuts. I've done that here to make She-Hulk look a little softer, but again, it's optional. Some colorists blur, some don't.. It's all your personal choice.

See..? I told you it was fairly simple. Please tell me it was fairly simple..!

All that's left now is to repeat the process on the remainder of Shulkie's skin tones (Figure 8), and then the same thing again for her costume (Figure 9). The rendering on the figure is done, now to move on to the backdrop!



Image 5. Backdrop and Adding Texture

STEP 5: BACKDROP AND ADDING TEXTURE

In the "Layers" tab, select the layer we called "Back" to work on the background.

Before I did anything else, I changed the backdrop colors to make She-Hulk stand out more. I simply picked a different color from my "Swatches" tab, selected the area I wanted to change with the wand tool, and used the flat fill tool to drop it in. This is why I have the backdrop as a separate layer, as nothing you do to the back layer affects the character that you've already rendered (I learned that to my cost...). Hurrah!

The backdrop for this image is really simple, so I decided to add some texture to jazz it up a little.

Basically, you're adding a picture of texture to the image as an overlay. With the great digital cameras we have today, it's easy to build up a collection of texture images, as anything you can photograph can be used: stone, leaves, fabrics, even clouds. Anything with a texture can be useful somewhere down the line.

For the main backdrop directly behind Shulkie, I chose a photo of some very cloudy-looking marble. From the "File" menu, choose "Open" and find the image you want to use. This opens in a new window. Then, using the "Move" tool (quick key "V") simply drag and drop the picture into your image. This creates a new layer from the dropped picture, above the layer that you're working on (in this case, "Back"). In the "Move" tool options at the top, make sure that "Show

Bounding Box" is ticked, and this will allow you to drag the image to the size of the area you want to texture (make sure to go over the edges a little).

Now, in Layers, select "Back" again, and using the wand, select the area. Make sure that the wand options shows the box marked "Contiguous" as ticked. (This only selects the area that you click on. Unchecking "Contiguous" will select all of that color no matter where it is on the image).

Once the area is selected, go to "Select", then "Inverse". This will select the portions of the image that you don't want textured. Then in Layers tab, select the layer with the texture file, and click "Edit" and then "Clear". This removes any of the texture image that's outside of the selected area, making it the precise size and shape you need.

Now de-select (CTRL and D) and open the Layers tab again. Select your texture layer. There's a drop down at the top of the Layers tab that has "Normal" in it by default. This sets the layer style. Using the dropdown, you can change the layer any way you want. The most common styles I use are "Overlay", "Soft Light", and "Hard Light". These will overlay your image onto the backdrop colors and give a great effect. There's also an "Opacity" slider so that you can fade the texture a little if it's too much.

When you have the effect you like, repeat the steps for any other parts of the image you want textured. I used another marble texture for the bottom portion which worked to great effect. The image is now pretty much done.



Image 6 Finishing the Image

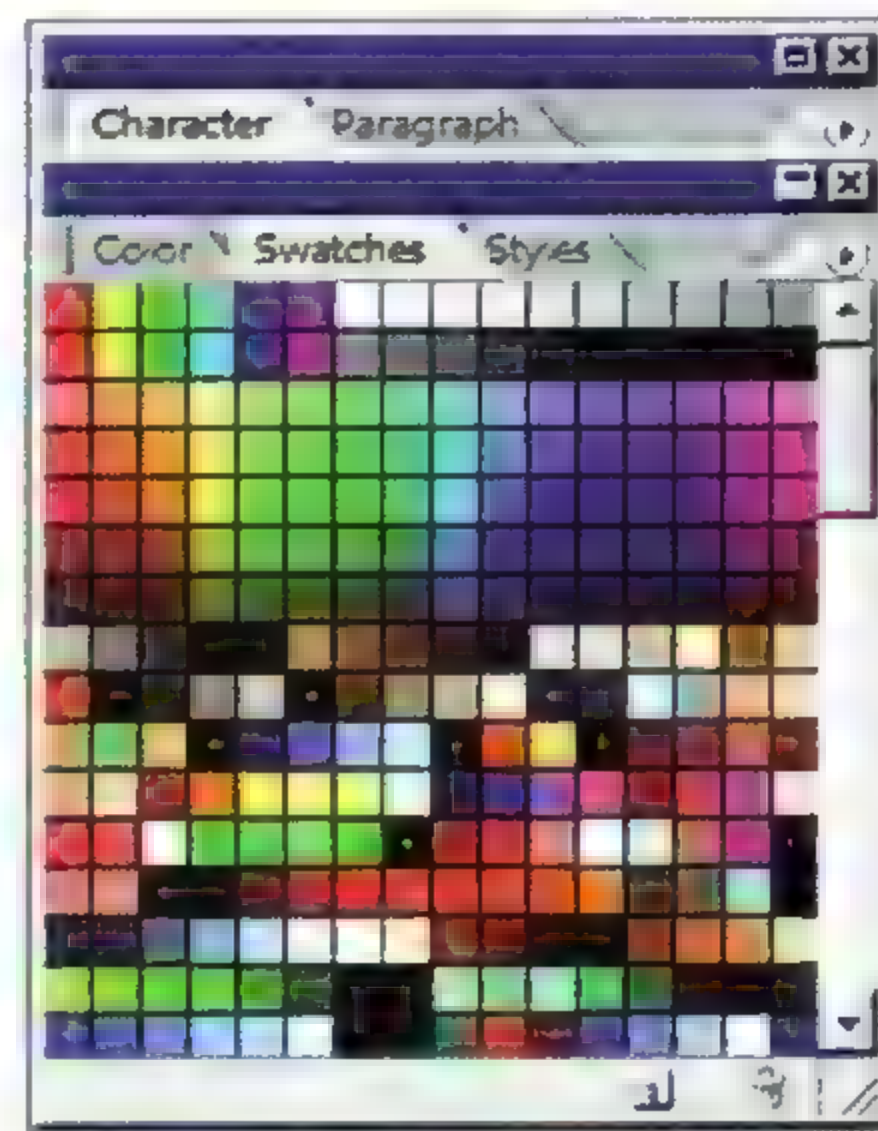
STEP 6: FINISHING THE IMAGE

At this point all the renders and texture work is done, so it's time to finish the image.

Select "Layer", then "Merge Visible." This puts all of your layers together in one layer. Then select "Layer", "Flatten Image", so that everything is nicely together in one locked image and ready for the next part.

NEXT ISSUE...

- FINALISING THE IMAGE FOR PRINT
- COLOR HOLDS
- LETTERS



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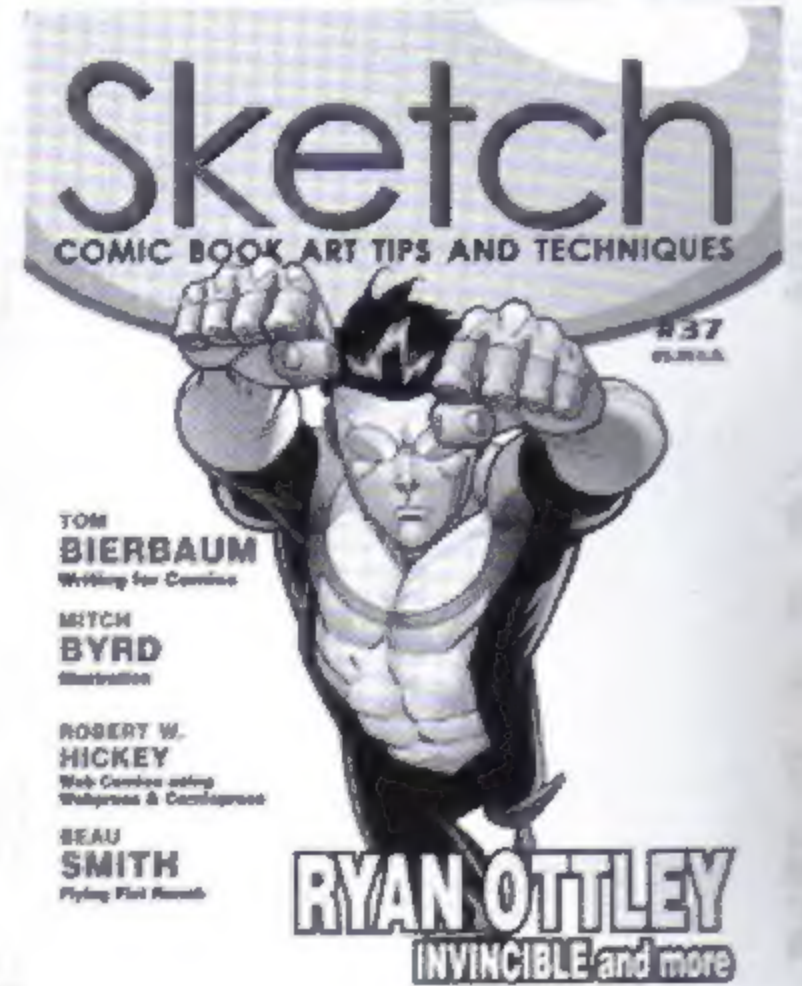
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